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8

**THE
IDEAL
SPONGER
LIFE**

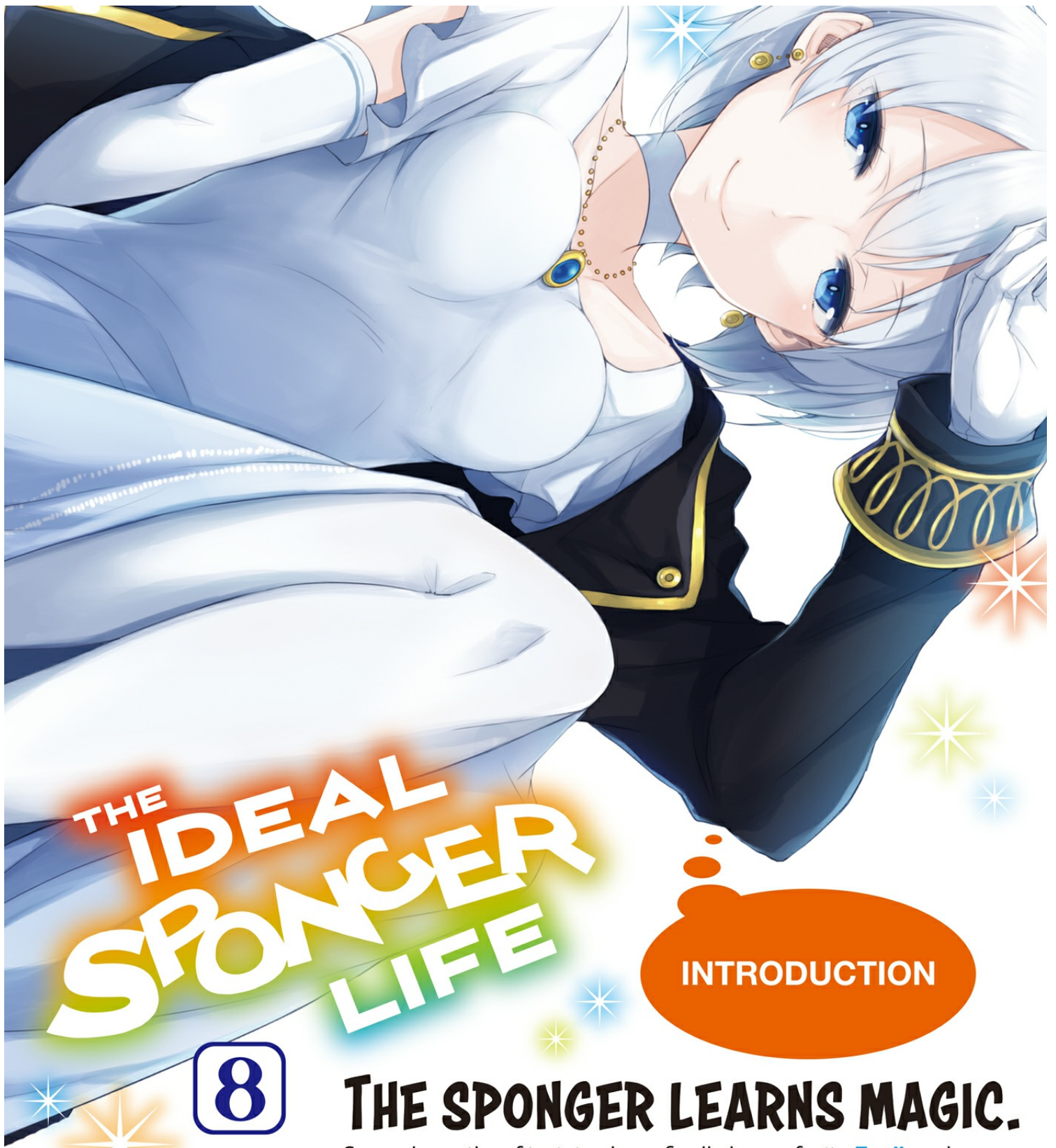


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THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

THE SPONGER LEARNS MAGIC.

Several months of training have finally borne fruit—[Zenjirou](#) has managed to [teleport](#). Now that he's acquired the spell, he's all set to take off for the Twin Kingdoms.

With marble-making almost a reality, the development of a compass, and the mass production of distilled spirits, Zenjirou is living anything *but* [the sponger life](#). Everything's coming up roses for the prince consort, whose beloved wife is pregnant with their second child. His relationship with [Princess Freya](#) has also developed dramatically as well.

However, he soon crosses paths with a young blonde girl of seemingly childlike innocence—who turns out to be a cherubic schemer with goals and ambitions of her own. Zenjirou might just be about to get burned!

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Prologue — Zenjirou's Return

A huge, eight-drake carriage progressed down the main street of the capital.

Of course, a carriage of such stature would hardly be alone, and it was guarded well with knights and soldiers ahead and behind it. The carriage was followed by another one, smaller but still big enough that it was clear a noble was on board.

This was Zenjirou and his retinue, returning from the Gaziel march.

Ordinarily, the royal carriage's passage would see the citizenry lined up on either side, cheering, but things were currently rather calm. Naturally, the road itself had been closed to traffic, so there were curious onlookers and children running alongside, but nothing with the dignity of a real "royal procession."

This was no real surprise, though. The leading roles in the recent wedding had been General Pujol and the new Pujol, Lucinda. Royalty though he may be, drawing more attention than the newlyweds would have been somewhat gauche.

The couple's return had involved a roofless carriage where the bride and groom had worn their wedding finery—though the general's outfit was a dress uniform—as they smiled and waved their way along the very same road.

While several days had since passed, Zenjirou was still nothing more than an attendee at that wedding and so was expected to return in a much more subdued fashion. Truthfully, it was somewhat of a relief. While he had grown somewhat accustomed to it, the lack of suspension and the poor state of the salt road they had been traveling on meant that he was fairly tired. He was therefore grateful that there was no expectation for him to keep up a smile and wave to the townsfolk—instead, he could simply sit back in his seat and relax within the carriage.

He let out a soft, unintentional sigh.

"Are you well, Your Majesty?" asked Freya Uppasala with a worried tone from

his side. She was the first princess of the country of Uppasala, found on the Northern Continent of this world. Her short, silver hair swayed as she looked his way.

“Thank you for the concern, Princess,” he answered her with a small smile. “I am simply relaxing now that we are back in the capital.”

There was no real falsehood in his statement. While he was indeed rather fed up with the juddering travel after so long in the carriage, it was nothing that would physically harm him. He was simply exceedingly tired. The bigger problem for him was that he did not feel uncomfortable with Freya sitting so close to him that their legs were nearly touching.

“I see. Well, we can relax properly once we inform Queen Aura of our return at the palace, so let us hold out until then.”

Zenjirou laughed before answering. “Well, you certainly still seem energetic. I suppose a captain needs that to cross the oceans as you have.”

“Thank you,” Freya replied with a chuckle of her own.

There was no sign of wariness in Zenjirou’s expression as they talked. He was, after all, an instant royal, one who had lived as an ordinary Japanese citizen until very recently. He didn’t have the strength of mind to remain wary of a woman when he spent so much time in close quarters with her, when the woman in question always interacted with him while wearing a friendly smile.

In that respect, Freya was—despite her youth—a much stauncher royal, so it was practically inevitable that he would fail in that to an extent. However, this didn’t mean things were going according to the princess’s desires either.

“There were a fair number of difficulties, but I enjoyed myself on this trip, Your Highness.”

“Indeed, it was pleasant.”

While he would respond to her bringing up their shared experience in the Gaziel march with a smile and agreement, his gaze soon moved away again. Towards the palace. His heart was already set on their destination, or more accurately, his home within it, the inner palace. While they were close enough to share each other’s body heat, Zenjirou’s heart was stolen by the prospect of

his reunion with the still-distant queen.

Realizing that his focus was not on her, Freya let out the slightest sigh of acknowledgment at the difficulty facing her.





Once back in the capital, Zenjirou's first destination was, of course, the royal palace.

Queen Aura, in the throne room, would hear from Prince Consort Zenjirou of his safe return, and the queen would express her thanks, marking the official end of his duties.

A marriage between high-ranking nobles was a domestic affair, and with the inclusion of royalty, things had to be done completely by the book. Therefore, despite the bother it caused, there needed to be an official public statement of his return.

Of course, the strict formal exchange of words could hardly be called a proper greeting as far as either of them were concerned. Zenjirou didn't feel truly *home* until they were finished in the royal palace and had returned to the inner palace.

"I'm home, Aura," he said with a tired look as his wife came to greet him at the door. This was him saying he was home in the proper sense of the word.

"Welcome back, Zenjirou," she answered with a kind smile, greeting her husband. She had gotten back to the inner palace slightly ahead of him.

It was still the afternoon, and usually, Aura would be working. However, her husband had returned, so she'd used the last several days to adjust her schedule in order to be free. That was actually something Zenjirou himself would struggle to do. His diligence meant that he could get caught up on things and shy away from delegating his work.

He tugged the door closed on his way in before using both arms to embrace his wife as they stood in the living room.

"I'm home," he repeated.

"Welcome back," she answered in kind.

The pair were practically the same height, so their cheeks rested against each other's as they each put their chin on their partner's shoulder.

Zenjirou let out a languid sigh as he held her. His right arm was around her

back with his other wrapped around her waist as he breathed in the feeling of his beloved wife.

The combination of being in the only room in this world that had electricity and feeling his wife in his arms finally made his return seem real. At the same time, the thread that had been holding the bone-deep weariness snapped.

While their hold on each other ought to have made reading his expression impossible, Aura managed to infer what he was feeling.

“Are you okay?” she asked. “Perhaps we should sit for a while.”

As she spoke, she supported his weight and guided him over to a sofa. Despite half of his body weight being on her in addition to the awkward positioning, her gait was steady. If their positions had been reversed, while it might not have been *impossible* for him, it would have taken everything Zenjirou had to support her in the same way.

While he still felt a slight sting of shame despite it being a fact of life, Zenjirou accepted her help and let himself relax on the sofa.

“Phew...” He sighed again, sinking into the familiar cushions. He almost felt as if he could fall asleep where he was.

“Maybe you should just sleep? I do not see an issue with that,” Aura told him softly from her position next to the sofa.

Zenjirou, though, screwed his eyes shut and shook his head vigorously. “Nope, it’s too early. Plus, I don’t want to miss out. I’ll manage.”

He was the type of person whose circadian rhythm took quite a bit of time to fix if he let it slip. It was only just getting towards evening. If he slept now and woke up in the middle of the night, it would mean several days of exhaustion to get back to his usual sleep cycle. With that in mind, he’d be better off keeping himself awake for the rest of the day.

Aura nodded in agreement before retrieving a silver pitcher from the fridge along with their blue and red faceted glasses.

“Alcohol makes people sleepier, so we should have only fruit juice. Here, shake off some of the exhaustion.”

“Oh, thanks,” he replied with a smile as she passed him some. They tapped the two glasses together with a slight *chink* and then he downed the contents.

“Mmh...”

The mix of sugar, citrus fruit juices, and chilled water certainly had an instantaneous effect on his fatigue.

“Ah, it’s been a while since I’ve had a cold drink. It’s something I can’t get anywhere else.”

“That we can have them at all is thanks to you. It will be some time before dinner. What say you to using this time to discuss events between us?”

A frown made its way to Zenjirou’s brow at her smiling suggestion. “Hmm, I can get behind it from an efficiency standpoint, but honestly, I don’t think I’m up to much of anything. Talking or listening, I think I’d end up missing a lot.”

While the drink had woken him up somewhat, his mind was still sleepy. He felt like any exchange would result in inaccuracies from him and wasn’t certain he’d be able to remember anything she told him.

She shook her head, though, dismissing his concern. “It matters not. An accurate discussion can wait until you are well rested tomorrow. I have set aside time for it. A rough idea is sufficient for now. In fact, the aim is not to use our time efficiently, but rather to keep you awake.”

“I see,” he nodded in understanding.

Talking definitely was a good way to keep yourself going. Naturally, it would do nothing against the tiredness, but distracting yourself from it to a degree could be useful.

Whether or not he was fit to actually discuss things, as long as it extended their conversation, it would be fine.

“Got it. Who’s starting, then? You said both of us, so I guess you’ve got something to bring up as well?”

“I suppose I do. We can spend tomorrow putting together the sequence of events properly, but let us focus on the essentials for tonight. I assume you have surmised as much, but the name ‘Nilda Gaziel’ is currently not present on

the register.”

“Yeah, I thought so. Phew, that makes it more likely that the way I went about it was right. It was pretty nicely done, if I do say so myself.”

“Oh, so you deduced that, then? Something happened with respect to this issue?”

The two of them continued with a relaxed conversation as opposed to a full debriefing for some time after that. Even without the details or a chronological sequence of events, the rough outline let them understand the situation their partner had been placed in.

When they had finished, Zenjirou’s exhaustion was the furthest thing from his mind, and there was a cold sweat running in rivers down his spine.

“I’d thought it could be the case, but she truly wasn’t a noble, then. That could have gone badly. Letting Nilda stay in the line of fire would have put us in a pretty bad position with Nabara.”

“Indeed. My own assumption was that you would realize it and act as if that were the case. That was why I abstained from actively contacting you. Things were far more dangerous than I had thought, though. I would have never considered a conflict between her and a knight from Nabara.”

Aura had let out a sigh of relief when she’d heard how the situation had developed in the Gaziel march. Speaking purely in terms of the conclusion, she’d been correct to put her faith in him and not actively make contact. At the same time, she recognized the extent of the possible issues that had arisen.

The disparity in the two countries’ strengths meant that even without nobility, a dispute between Nilda as a commoner and one of their knights would not have been insurmountable. But if it had happened, it would have certainly been an issue of some import.

In that respect, the agreement Zenjirou had managed to obtain—that the matter was to be considered to never have happened and neither party would bring it back up—was perhaps the best possible result.

“My thanks, Zenjirou. Your achievements here cannot be overstated,” she told him with a smile, leaning into his arm.

Their habit was to sit across from each other for serious topics and next to each other for general chats. While the topic was clearly very serious and their current positions contravened their unwritten rule, it also strengthened the overall impression that this was more of a conversation than a real report.

Her unreserved praise coupled with the sensation of heat on his shoulder and arm made him smile slightly awkwardly. "Hearing you say that makes it all worth it. Yeah, I can honestly say that I did well this time, at least," he answered, breaking his usual habit of humility to speak proudly about himself. That just served to show how strongly he felt about his achievement.

Aura's own smile widened in response. "The margrave and Lady Nilda herself should still be in the march. Well, I will contact Severo to prevent doing things twice. This was our slip, so I shall offer teleportation at no charge."

"Severo?" Zenjirou asked, parroting the unfamiliar name.

She gave him a quick explanation. "He is a noble from a vassal family of the Gaziels and is responsible for their estate within the capital. The margrave's direct family is temporarily entirely outside of the capital, so Severo is currently acting as their proxy here."

In Capua, nobility came with an obligation to have the prior, current, or next head of the family reside within the capital at all times, but there were provisions for important family events that permitted all members to be temporarily away.

"I see; got it. Still, depending on how things go, it could be big information. Can this Severo be trusted?"

Vassal houses were not necessarily loyal towards their liege's house. Many influential vassal houses were branch families, so it was relatively common for them to wish to take their superior's place.

Aura shook her head and brushed his concerns aside. "While it is, of course, impossible to be certain, I feel that it will be acceptable. The Gaziel family is close to their vassals to a degree rarely seen in nobility and many of them have trustworthy personalities. Also, Severo is Amanda's husband."

The unexpected statement blew away all of his exhaustion as his eyes went

wide.

“The head maid? Whoa, that definitely makes him feel more trustworthy. That’s a bit of a prejudice anyway, though.”

Assuming the relatives of a person you trusted were also trustworthy was risky. A person of principle was not always related to other people of principle.

While he understood that intellectually, emotionally, he couldn’t refute the quick assumption that a confidant’s relations could be trusted.

“I would assume that I will be sending a dispatch to the margrave in the coming days. He and Lady Nilda will likely arrive with their copy of the register. The margrave has a strong sense of duty and will likely wish to thank you when he becomes aware of the circumstances, so act with that in mind.”

“Got it,” he answered with a slight nod.

It was easy to imagine the margrave acting in that way based on what Zenjirou knew of the man’s personality. He could leave his interaction with them until the Gaziels arrived in the capital, he decided.

“That’s about all I’ve got. What did you have?”

With the conversation passing back to her, Aura thought for a moment before speaking. “Hmm, there are several things I have to tell you. Firstly, our glass manufacturing is progressing well. The shells and white sand you brought back from Valentia have led to a dramatic reduction in coloring along with an increase in viscosity and ease of handling. It sounds as if we will soon begin the production of experimental jewels.”

“Wow, you’d said something along those lines before, but it’s that much better now?” Zenjirou was ready to leap up from the sofa, eyes aglow. However, Aura soon rained on his parade.

“The glass itself, yes. The equipment necessary for its manufacturing, though, is less so. Things have not progressed at all on that front, so mass production is a distant dream. Currently, the temperatures required are beyond what the furnaces can withstand, so they are destroyed in the process. We are therefore at an impasse. Of course, the initial manpower was limited, so the lack of continuity is perhaps a boon.”

The difficulty with mass production would become a bottleneck eventually, but there were many more things to do during these preliminary steps. They needed to formalize a process to get transparent, colorless glass on purpose rather than by chance, improve the techniques to create spherical shapes, and hopefully decrease the bubbles present.

“With the higher viscosity, you should be able to cut it and use a metal slope to automatically get spheres, but...describing it as a pool-side waterslide won’t help, will it? How to explain it? You take something the shape of a spiral staircase, then roll hot, viscous glass down it, and when it reaches the ash box at the bottom, it should be fairly round...” He was trying to describe what he remembered from a middle school trip to a glass museum but lacked the expressiveness to describe it verbally. “I’ll sketch it on some paper at some point.”

“I would appreciate it.”

Her answer and accompanying shrug bore out his assumption that she hadn’t understood what he meant. That aside, even small-scale manufacturing becoming a reality led to the next thing to consider—the magic tools created using them.

“With regard to magic tools, Prince Francesco has once again made a bothersome suggestion,” Aura suddenly said, the thought popping into her head with an accompanying frown and sigh.

“Hm, what’d he say?”

The words “bothersome” and “Prince Francesco” were practically synonyms at this point, so he wasn’t surprised as he carried the conversation forward. The bothersome suggestion in question was none other than the proposal of a magic tool for enchantment itself. Even the briefest moment of thought made it obvious that the suggestion was one that could shake the continent as a whole, and Aura wanted to confide in her husband and ask for his thoughts. However, upon further introspection, she decided against it.

“Hmmm...I cannot say for now. Prince Francesco was very particular about it not being spread. I would rather not renege on my word at present.”

While verbal accords between royalty and nobility were not kept without fail,

breaking your promises too often would still harm your credibility.

“Therefore, while I cannot explain the specifics, I feel there is a large possibility that it will involve those marbles of yours.”

“Right, I get the gist, then.” Zenjirou nodded, satisfied enough.

If the idiot-savant—or sometimes it just seemed like he was a plain idiot—had a “secret” that involved Zenjirou’s marbles, it was likely an attempt to create a magic tool that bordered on the absurd. On top of that, if Aura hadn’t outright shot it down, there must have been some benefit to Capua as well.

Zenjirou may not have been a genius, but he could still easily come to that conclusion.

“Got it. I’ll make sure I’m ready to hear it whenever. I do want to check, though. The marbles from my world are one thing, but the ones we make here won’t be mine, will they?”

That reminder, albeit phrased as a question, prompted her to think for a moment. “Well, the technique was all provided by you, so in the interest of fairness, you would have the rights to them...”

However, she couldn’t come right out and say they would be his because she could see the drawbacks to such a statement. While it might be a matter of counting their chickens before they’d hatched, if mass production became feasible and the latent enchantment magic surfaced in Zenijrou’s descendants, the rights to marble production would be a big deal. The moment Capua had both an enchanter and mass production of marbles, it would mean they could effectively mass-produce magic tools.

It was a double-edged sword. If they were under the control of the monarch, then it would strengthen the monarchy as a whole. If, however, they were under the control of another royal, they could become a fulcrum to destabilize the country. Placing the right to their production in Zenjirou’s hands would greatly increase the possibility that they would once again end up outside the monarch’s control.

It was unlikely that any child of Aura and Zenjirou would inherit the magic for enchantment. Carlos Zenkichi’s abundance of mana that could allow him to use

both space-time magic and enchantment was an exception among exceptions. Ordinarily, their children's aptitude would be overwhelmed by the strong foundation of space-time magic from Aura, with the most remote of possibilities that enchantment would surface.

This would then mean that any enchanter from Capua would be born of Zenjirou and some other woman—in other words, a branch royal.

Of course, they would then take on the task of producing any magic tools. At that point, Zenjirou having the rights to the production of the core component—the marbles—would cause complications.

The branch royals would be of Zenjirou's blood, but not Aura's. Naturally, they would expect to inherit those rights from their father, since they were the ones who would mainly make use of the marbles.

Whether their mother was Freya or some other woman, their parents would add their own voices to those calls to further their own interests.

On the other hand, placing those rights with Aura would drastically curtail those possibilities for future generations.

Regardless of how equal their rights were, she would have no obligation to pass them down to a non-related branch royal. It would be far more natural for them to go to her own child—the heir to the throne.

Zenjirou was all too aware of that as well.

"Yeah, let's face it, you've spearheaded the development here and appointed the craftsmen, so the rights should be yours. I've got no reason to butt in," Zenjirou said easily, not an ounce of reluctance or possessiveness in his tone.

"Are you certain?"

Even Aura, having grown used to his understanding nature, was taken aback. After all, this was different. Rather than taking the power and reward that he should be given, he was unconditionally surrendering all rights to knowledge that *he* had brought. Knowledge that could one day form the backbone of the country as a whole and vastly further his interests.

Given their relationship, she was certain that he was completely open and

willing to do so, but her own sense of values meant that she could not fathom it. Even though she knew mentally that this was a trifle to him, emotionally it was less comprehensible.

Whether he was aware of her thoughts or not, Zenjirou gave an easy agreement, nodding without any reluctance on his face. “Yup. Production of items that can become media for magic tools feels like one of those things that need to remain under the monarch’s control. I’ll help as much as I can until we get mass production going.”

Aura sighed at the indifferent response, putting a palm to her head. “There are times when I wonder whether you really are a human,” she said eventually. “Sometimes I think you might be some grand spirit, manifested to suit my whims.”

That was how perfect a man he was for Aura; it truly felt like that was the case on occasion.

Disregarding the extent of his abilities, he usually did whatever she wanted him to and didn’t show any interest in things she’d rather he didn’t do.

Aura’s understanding of the harshness of life and the difficulties of balancing benefits that she had acquired over her years, particularly during the war, meant that his understanding nature could sometimes be almost frightening.

Of course, Zenjirou wasn’t so dense that he didn’t realize the same. He knew intellectually that the value system in this world was different than his own and knew that restraint and humility would not necessarily lead to good outcomes once relationships got to a certain level of closeness.

The problem was, wealth and influence were inarguably burdens to him. He was used to being part of the crowd, so the level of things he could have was limited. It had nothing to do with restraint; he simply saw the possibility of personal influence to be something to avoid, if he could.

A rueful smile made its way to his lips as he began explaining himself as fully as he could. “Hmm, to me that kind of thing is just a job, something that needs doing. It’s not something I’m using to try and get in your good graces. It’s just how I feel.”

“I know that you are telling me the truth, but I still cannot let it settle. It feels almost like I am exploiting you. No, it does not simply *feel* that way. From an objective standpoint, that is exactly what I am doing.”

“I’d love to say don’t worry about it, but we need to keep it in mind due to the scrutiny on us. Our positions are delicate enough as it is. If we can’t hide my contribution, then we’ll need to have at least the appearance of you rewarding me for it. I’ll take whatever reward works.”

Aura’s lips quirked as a sigh passed through them. He was only concerned about the public implications. “I would much rather *actually* reward you rather than just keep up the appearance of it. You are correct, though; appearances are important for royalty like us. The most suitable option here would be a title. While those with territories like Valentia or Potosi are obviously out of the question, there are several alternatives without such constraints. Accepting one of them would work well.”

Titles without land attached to them were commonly called prestige titles. Unlike posts within the royal court, they didn’t come with a stipend, so focusing on collecting titles could lead to increased financial pressure with the need to have the finery associated with those titles, but that wasn’t a concern for a royal.

Besides, he already had the finery and other necessities for his position as royalty, and even if there was an extra cost, the royalty’s weapon in their space-time magic would make getting the money simple.

“A title, huh? Well, managing territory would be a hassle, so one without it would be best. About that ‘proper’ reward, though...there’s only one thing I want,” he answered, his smile shifting from its unfettered curve to stretch further. To be blunt, it had changed into a lecherous grin.

“Ah, w-well, about that. Zenjirou, would you calm down and listen?” Aura managed, putting a hand up against his chest to keep some distance between them even as she let him hold her closer.

She was acting unusual, and her awkward tone coupled with avoiding his gaze gave him a bad feeling, but he listened regardless.

“Yeah, what’s up?”

“Well. Uh, bear in mind that this is not yet certain, but...our second...might be on its way.”

There was silence.

Once Zenjirou understood what she meant by their second, he froze in his embrace.

Their second child might currently be growing inside of her. That was a cause for celebration, and plenty of it. When considering the reason he had been summoned, it could be described as fulfilling a dear ambition.

Of course, Zenjirou himself was *fundamentally* happy to have a child with her. Their first child—Carlos Zenkichi—was precious to him, and gaining another was a joyous occasion indeed.

And he did feel that way...but at the same time, it was a harsh thing to hear just then. After all, it would mean an unavoidable hiatus for their nightly activities.

He truly did love his child, but he also loved the act of making said child to almost the same extent. Especially now, after a month away from home, he was eager in more ways than one.

Silence reigned as the two held each other on the sofa, no words passing between the queen and her consort.

After well over a minute, Zenjirou finally broke the silence.
“That’s...really...really good news.”

His voice was strangled as he gave a verbal affirmation, the simultaneous look of joy and sorrow being the perfect example of a teary smile.

Chapter 1 — Nilda Gaziel — 1

Roughly ten days had passed since Zenjirou's return to the capital. The sky above the city was blanketed in a thick layer of cloud, which disgorged rain down onto the roofs of the inner palace, setting up countless ripples through the ponds in the courtyards.

The single saving grace was that the rain was not accompanied by the high winds that a typhoon would be, but the deluge was far beyond Japan's "rainy season" and was audible even through the storm shutters.

This marked the start of Capua's rainy season, a period that saw the lowest level of long-distance travel within the country.

It went without saying that there would be more travel during the active season, but even the third, hottest season was better suited for that kind of journey in spite of the majority of the day being spent shut away from the heat.

Despite its name, actual rainfall was only present every one in two, or maybe one in three days on average. However, with the lighter maintenance of their transportation infrastructure, roads outside of the capital and arterial routes like the salt road would often become like small rivers.

The rain also deposited more dirt in the rivers, making securing drinking water more difficult during the journey, and the rain made setting up camp a miserable endeavor. There were even instances where rivers bursting their banks led to carnivorous aquatic drakes appearing en route despite ordinarily never appearing on land. Coupled with the decreased visibility, attacks from such creatures could end in unexpected defeat.

All of this together meant that long-distance travel was avoided unless absolutely necessary during the rainy season. In that respect, Margrave Gaziel and his second daughter Nilda Gaziel's arrival was quite accurately described as "in the nick of time."

While their surroundings were soaked in a darkened green by the driving rain,

Zenjirou was sitting in front of his computer in the living room, reciting an incantation with a look of concentration on his face.

“Send all things in the space that I envision to the place that I desire. As compensation, I offer—”

The language of magic sounding like plain Japanese to him was proof that the soul of magic was translating it for him. That, in turn, meant that he had pronounced it correctly.

Silently, Zenjirou used the keyboard to input a check mark for the tenth time into the spreadsheet he had open.

Those checks were symbols for his correct pronunciation that day. The string of ten checks meant that he had pronounced the incantation for teleportation ten times in a row.

“Hell yeah!” he cheered in a flood of emotion, throwing both hands up into the air from his seat.

The action was impulsive and half unconscious. While Zenjirou usually didn’t show his emotions particularly strongly, that he did so now was no real shock. His roughly three months of effort since Aura had bade him learn the spell had finally paid off.

Of course, he had thus far only cleared the first hurdle of pronunciation and still had the second and third hurdles of mana and visualization to go. Roughly speaking, though, he was a third of the way there, so he felt rather accomplished.

Zenjirou had dedicated a large amount of his time to practicing since his return from the Gaziel march, so his joy was all the greater. His cheer transitioned into a stretch with a grunt as he rolled his neck to work out the knots in his muscles.

Then, none other than Aura—his beloved wife—appeared at the door, possibly having heard his exclamation.

“You sound as if you have scaled your mountain,” she commented.

Zenjirou twisted to see her walking towards him in a comfortable dress with a

soft smile. There was a maid on either side, flanking her.

“Oh, sorry, was I too loud?” he asked, abandoning his computer as he stood up and trotted over.

“You need not worry. After all, your efforts are for my sake, are they not?”

“Well, I guess it’d be for you *and* our second child, right?” he answered, taking her hand and leading her to a sofa in the middle of the room.

Aura let him tug her without complaint and relaxed into the dark leather. The maids would usually remain outside in deference to Zenjirou’s preferences, but they didn’t this time. His dedicated practicing of magic was due to the increasing likelihood that his wife was pregnant with their second child.

Aura’s monthly visitor was still yet to arrive, and Doctor Michel—the royal physician—had said upon a second examination that it was likely she was pregnant and that she was to act accordingly until they could prove otherwise.

Naturally, the information that Aura was once again pregnant had spread through the palace rapidly. While he had initially been shocked by her pregnancy upon having just returned, once Zenjirou had regained his equilibrium, the one emotion he felt was overwhelming joy.

While it was a shame that his nights with his wife would once again be put on hold for a time, the happiness he felt at the news of a second child far outstripped such concerns.

The next thing that came to mind though was his prior oath. The events of her first pregnancy with Carlos Zenkichi had made him realize that pregnancy was a risky endeavor, even for royals and nobility in this world. He’d therefore vowed to learn teleportation before his second child’s birth so that he could summon aid from the healers of the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle if need be.

Now, with the possibility looming, Zenjirou found a fire lit beneath him by his own promise. If she truly was pregnant, he could put it off no longer. He had to learn teleportation as quickly as possible and visit the Twin Kingdoms.

While Zenjirou was a member of royalty that the other country had diplomatic ties with, he could hardly teleport in out of nowhere and demand help for his wife. He would need to visit beforehand and build up a relationship,

explaining that he may one day wish to summon a healer from them and ask if they were willing.

He sat down at his wife's side and thought.

"I can't go anywhere until the rainy season's over, so that'll be my deadline. I'll have to learn it before then."

Seeing him clench his fist in determination, Aura smiled gently.

"Do not push yourself unduly. The rainy season will be followed by the heat, after all. While it is not to the same degree, long-distance travel will still be significantly difficult. Therefore, why not consider your time extended by half a year?"

It should have gone without saying, but Zenjirou would not trundle his way to the Twin Kingdoms in a carriage. Valentia and the Gaziel march were one thing, being within their borders, but it would be too risky to go abroad in that way. While other countries had no choice, the Capuans had their trump card of teleportation and would not expose themselves to danger that could be avoided.

For Zenjirou, Aura's teleportation would be enough. However, he could not visit the country alone, even as royalty. Teleportation was infeasible for the knights, soldiers, and maids needed to see to both his protection and general needs, and they would therefore have to travel over land.

That, in turn, meant that even teleportation magic did not completely unshackle his movements from the season. He could acknowledge that she was correct because of that, but that did not mean he could accept the out she offered.

"Right. Thanks for that, but it's the kind of thing I have to get down quickly. If you really are pregnant, I'll need to work more as well and might not be able to practice as much."

Her previous pregnancy had forced Aura to curtail her own duties until she reached a stable stage. That coincided with a sharp increase in the amount of work Zenjirou had to do as her proxy. All in all, it meant he would have to keep up his efforts with practicing the spell, act as Aura's representative, *and* go to

the Twin Kingdoms and negotiate for a healer.

Naturally, there was a strong possibility that such negotiations could take a good length of time, so Zenjirou would have to periodically return to Capua—learning teleportation would make a round trip possible—to act in her place.

Either way, he had many busy days ahead of him.

“I have brought much hardship to you. Thank you,” Aura said, softly placing her hand on his.

“You’re perfectly welcome,” he answered, returning her grip.



While it was true that the rainy season greatly diminished people’s overall activity, it did not completely suspend it. The nobility in the capital in particular suffered the least effects. The main streets were all paved and well maintained in addition to the majority of the nobles traveling by way of covered carriage.

The main places they gathered were the palace or the various estates around the city, each of which was a sturdy stone construction that could shrug off the wind and rain. All in all, this meant that noble society as it existed, centered on the palace, continued apace regardless of the season.

On this day in particular, the nobles assembled in the audience chamber were directing curious looks to the queen upon her dais, the aging feudal lord before her, and the unfamiliar young girl at his side. Today’s audience today was not a scheduled affair but an extra meeting as the result of a hurried summons in the queen’s name. That alone was more than enough to signify an abnormal state of affairs.

Many of the nobles had been uneasy, their faces showing their curiosity about what had happened, but they were now calm again. Margrave Gaziel looked utterly unruffled despite his attendance being mandated, so it could not be too grave.

At the center of their many gazes from her prominent position on her throne, Aura began speaking in a measured tone. “I appreciate your gathering in response to my summons today. You have all been called here because there is information that you must hear. Margrave Miguel Gaziel, come forth with your

companion.”

“At once,” came the immediate response. The older man moved with a grace that belied his age as he walked forward.

The small girl—Nilda Gaziel—followed a few steps behind him. For her part, she was quaking with nerves to an extent that all could tell with a glance. Her pace, gait, and the way she held the hem of her dress were barely within the bounds of court etiquette, but her steps were clearly heavier on account of her nerves.

The gathered nobles were all stirring as well. To the vast majority of them, she was a girl they had neither seen nor heard of before, but almost all of them were watching her movements with concern. Completely unknown she may have been, but it was easy to make the assumption that she was part of the Gaziel family thanks to her presence at the margrave’s side.

The fact that some of the nobles here were political enemies of the Gaziel family and yet didn’t have hostile expressions or hope she would embarrass herself in front of the queen almost seemed like a slight threat. Regardless, there was a palpable sense of relief throughout the room when she managed to kneel before the throne, albeit slower than would be normal.

Then, as if to revive the tension and squash the laxer atmosphere, the queen’s cool voice rang out across the room.

“I have heard that the girl here is your child, Margrave Miguel Gaziel. Is that the case?”

“It is, Your Majesty,” he confirmed. “This is Nilda Gaziel, my daughter.”

“I see. I have no intention of calling your family’s long history of loyalty into question, Margrave. However, I must speak on this. The register of names I manage has no record of the name ‘Nilda Gaziel.’”

Her clear proclamation sent a buzz through the room. That was no surprise; a noble’s presence on the register was just that important.

In Capua, those with their names recorded in the monarch’s register were nobles. In extreme cases, even the legitimate children of nobles were not themselves nobles until they had an audience in the capital and were added to

the roster.

In fact, nobles who were not blessed with successors of their own could adopt a promising citizen of their fief and petition the monarch to have the adoptee's name added to the register, whereupon they would become a noble. Conversely, lower nobles with economic limitations and multiple children would not necessarily have those children recorded. That was how strong of a bearing the registration had on the nobility. In a sense, it was even more important than their actual lineage.

Inevitably, attention shifted to the margrave and his daughter. However, unlike the openly shocked spectators, the pair in question did not falter. In Nilda's case, she was already acting like a petrified bunny, so she had no way of showing further nerves, but that was not the case for her father. His expression remained composed as he shook his head and disputed his queen's words.

"Even so, it is no falsehood that Nilda is my child and was entered onto the register by a previous king, Your Majesty. I have a duplicate of the register from that event."

As he spoke, the margrave pulled a sheet of drake parchment from his breast pocket. It was a transcript that served as proof of an entry onto the register from the time it had taken place. It was, of course, an exceedingly important document and would normally be stored in the most secure place that each family had. It was not usually something that could be produced on demand to prove a claim.

The general mood of the room shifted to understanding as they realized this was a scripted exchange, an act solely for external appeal. Aura and the margrave had met unofficially several days prior, where it had been explained that Nilda was not present on the register, and they had ascertained that the transcript was not a forgery.

However, Aura gave no indication of that earlier meeting, remaining seated as she handed out an order to a civil servant waiting to the side.

"A duplicate? Bring it here."

"At once. Margrave, I will take custody of this."

Once Aura took possession of the document from the young official, she spoke with emphasis.

“This is indeed genuine. It holds the signature of King Sancho. The writing is without a doubt his.”

Of course, she could only make that statement because it had been verified by a specialist in handwriting several days earlier. Sancho I was Aura’s brother from the same mother, so she had some familiarity with his writing. She did not, however, have the memory to be able to make a definitive statement that it was his writing at a glance.

Having verified the copy, she looked out at the assembled nobles. “This transcript means that I must reluctantly accept that the current register is incomplete. Margrave, the signature on this document is King Sancho’s, correct?”

“Indeed, His Majesty entered Nilda’s name six years prior and entrusted that copy to me at the same time. It took place in Potosi.”

Sancho I was known as “the King Vengeant.” As the name implied, he had sworn vengeance for his older brother’s death, and most of his short reign was spent on the battlefield. Therefore, the names he had added had been done either on the front line or the nearest town, Potosi. He had then given his life on the battlefield, and the register in his possession had been lost.

After explaining those presumptions, Aura continued. “This is an unforeseen incident. Therefore, her name shall be reinstated unconditionally as a onetime exception. Naturally, the date of registration will be transcribed directly from your duplicate.”

The statement that it would be unconditional was important because there was usually a charge to register a noble. The money was a trifle to a family like the Gaziels but was no small amount for fringe nobility.

Aura then addressed the official behind her. “Bring my writing implements.”

“Here, Your Majesty,” the official said, offering a piece of wood akin to a drafting board along with a drake bone pen.

Two officials supported the board on either side, and she opened the large

book atop it as she took the ornate pen in hand. The pens used in Capua were generally like glass pens, dipped into ink with hard nibs.

She dipped the pen into an ink pot held by another official and ran the pen over the page with her usual composure as all eyes watched, writing Nilda Gaziel's name along with her guarantor and their relationship. She then added the date from six years ago in addition to the current date before entrusting the book to the officials and spreading out the margrave's duplicate copy.

There were not many things to write here. Underneath the name of Sancho I, Aura added her own name and the date in smaller writing next to the date from six years ago. Having completed that, she left both documents to the officials and addressed the gathered nobles.

"The defect has now been rectified. Nilda Gaziel is and has been a noble of our lands for six years. I, Aura I, add my own signature today to Sancho I's."

The fault lay with the register the royal family administered, so the Gaziels were not in the wrong. Aura was therefore making a statement that the margrave's actions in treating Nilda as nobility were correct and that she would allow no dissent on that matter. Given her position as the country's queen, there was no "apology," but the way it was said indicated an acceptance that all fault lay with the royal family.

"While Sancho I's reign may not have lasted a year, it is hard to believe that Nilda Gaziel was the only addition to the register in that time span. Those who believe there may be others are to petition at a later date. Assuming they have a transcript of the register bearing Sancho I's signature, they will be treated the same way as Nilda Gaziel."

The audience hall stirred at the queen's proclamation. Apparently, there were those who felt they might have been affected, and there were several people with serious expressions.

Once silence returned, the queen continued. "This re-registration will be available for a year hence. Those concerned should bring their duplicate alongside their guarantor before this day next year. Further, if you have no one who may act as guarantor but are able to explain the reason for it, you may come alone."

The guarantor was, as the name implied, someone who stood in support of the person who would become a noble. Ordinarily, it would be their parents, but there were exceptions for things like vassal families, where the main family's head would stand for them instead. The reason for Aura's extra provision was that there were families where the entire older generation had been killed during the war.

"That will be all," she finally stated, declaring the audience over. The gathered nobles bowed deeply, thoughts already spinning through their minds as to what would happen next.



The following day was marked by a downpour. The average amount of rain during even the rainy season was only one in every two or three days, but today was one such day.

The pounding rain was audible through the closed shutters, and it had made the room dark enough that they needed several oil lamps to light the room despite the early hour.

Zenjirou was currently in the gloomy room, meeting with both Miguel and Nilda Gaziel.

"Sir Zenjirou," the margrave said, "I offer you my deepest, *deepest* thanks!"
"Thank you very much," added Nilda.

The elderly father and his just-of-age daughter didn't sit on the sofa, but instead prostrated themselves on the carpet. Aura had warned her husband that this might happen beforehand, so he managed to respond without showing any shock.

"Raise your heads. We will be unable to talk like this," Zenjirou said, gesturing for them to be seated.

"Yes, sir, excuse us," came the margrave's answer, echoed a moment later by his daughter.

Once they were seated, Zenjirou let out an inaudible sigh of relief. Were this a public event, he could have accepted it as merely part of their customs, but a

true prostration like the margrave had just performed was mentally overwhelming. He had been brought up as an ordinary Japanese citizen, so he wasn't accustomed to others doing such things. However, that was merely his own biases speaking, and to the margrave, it was necessary to demonstrate the depths of his gratitude.

Miguel Gaziel was unusually weak when it came to subterfuge for a noble, but he was by no means unintelligent. With the knowledge that Nilda's name had been absent from the register, he needed only to think back on the events of the wedding ceremony for an easy hypothesis as to why Zenjirou had acted in the way he had.

Freya had forced her way into what had originally been a dispute between Nilda and a Nabaran knight and caused things to center on the former. Zenjirou had not only refrained from restraining his "tomboyish" partner's actions but had in fact wholeheartedly supported her. Then, during the final judgment, he had suggested that the events be considered to have never happened, with neither party being able to bring them back up.

Each of those things had seemed strange individually, but with the additional knowledge that Nilda had not been a noble at the time, his goals became clear. Zenjirou had been protecting them. He had ensured that a commoner girl—Nilda—would not have future problems due to the interactions that had taken place. That was all that made sense.

"Sir Zenjirou, were you already aware of Nilda's circumstances at the time?" the margrave asked.

Rather than commit to sounding him out, the man had questioned him directly, quite unlike a noble usually would. Understanding the previous mistake as he did, the margrave could simply ask him bluntly.

Zenjirou considered the question for a moment but decided there was no longer a reason to hide it and answered truthfully. "I was not certain. I had just not heard of you having a daughter named Nilda. I acted assuming the worst could be true and am glad it did not develop into a disaster."

"And that is all thanks to you, sir," the margrave said, bowing once more but remaining seated this time.

His behavior was not overdramatic in the least. Without Zenjirou's interference, things would not have necessarily been unsalvageable, but there could have been severe diplomatic repercussions.

Of course, it was the royal family that had lost part of the register, so you could easily consider it to be Zenjirou cleaning up after them, but things were not so simple politically. While the mistake had been made by a prior king, the Gaziel family would technically have been allowing a common girl to argue with a Nabaran knight. If Nabara had made a complaint, there was a strong possibility that it would be to the Gaziels rather than the royal family.

But Zenjirou's suggestion had put paid to even that possibility. The margrave might have things to say about the loss of the register to the royal family as a whole, but with Zenjirou having inferred what he had and working out a solution, he felt nothing but gratitude towards the prince consort.

"I will not forget this debt to you. If there is anything I can do, anything at all, I ask that you request it of me."

"It heartens me to hear a general with your long service say as much. Personally, I would like nothing more than for you to continue swearing your loyalty to the Capuan royal family."

There was a beat of silence.

"I understand," the man agreed.

Nilda was sitting at his side with a smile, seemingly unaware that there was an implied meaning to their words. Zenjirou was concerned about the margrave's gratitude being directed towards him and had therefore stressed that any loyalty should be towards the royal family as a whole. After a moment of thought, the other man accepted it.

Zenjirou himself considered it to be overly cautious, but he much preferred to head off the risks as soon as possible. A knight like Natalio Maldonado, who only brought his own strength to any pledge of loyalty, would be gratefully received, but the loyalty of a feudal lord with a foundation of his own could be far from a good thing in the future if that loyalty was to Zenjirou personally.

For her part, despite Nilda's involvement, she seemed entirely unaware of

those implications and had an innocent smile on her face. She was not an idiot either; her older sister had instructed her on noble society etiquette since she was brought into the family, so she was aware of the scope of her name being absent from the register. That was all that she understood, however. She simply had a sense of gratitude to Zenjirou for making the effort, but no more calculating thoughts as to wondering why or what he would want in return.

“Thank you very much, Sir Zenjirou.” Due to that, her thanks was simply full of pure, almost sunny, joy.

“It was nothing,” he answered, her smile drawing out one of his own. “I am just glad that nothing major happened.”



At the same time, Aura was meeting with her confidantes in another room of the palace. Her secretary, Fabio, the head court mage, Espiridion, and her maid, Margarete, were all present for the private meeting.

“Your Majesty, are you well?” Margarete asked as she guided the queen to the sofa.

“I am for now. After all, Doctor Michel is still not certain that I am pregnant,” she answered with a slight wave of thanks.

Aura was the only one to sit, her three confidantes forming a semicircle in front of her. The middle-aged secretary, the elderly mage, and the young maid. They had nothing in common in terms of age or occupation, but the commonality they shared lay in their competency and loyalty, and in Aura’s trust in them...though one of them was slightly less trustworthy in terms of personality, competence and loyalty aside.

It was the person with a less trustworthy personality—Fabio—who began the conversation. “So, Your Majesty, are we to assume that we are gathered here today in regard to the register?”

Aura nodded slightly in answer. “We are. I will want to confirm how my work and pregnancy will proceed in parallel, but the register is more important for now. Margarete, give your report, as best you currently know.”

The woman in question was unusual in appearance for a Capuan, with blonde

hair, blue eyes, and pale skin. She gave a small bow and began to speak. “Yes, Your Majesty. At least four nobles after the meeting made comments that they may be affected.”

The queen frowned at her spy’s words. “So the problem is not limited to Lady Nilda. I was resigned to this, but it would seem we are in for some difficulties. With that said, those within the capital are unlikely to be a major issue.”

“Indeed. The real problems will come with those who are not, the potential missing names who have no one within their houses who is aware of the situation,” Fabio agreed.

The recent war had left multiple noble houses with insufficient numbers, so there was a particularly large number of noble families that were exempt from maintaining a presence in the capital. Those houses, shut away within their own lands, could easily miss the chance to deal with anyone absent from the register.

The aged mage, Espiridion, offered his own thoughts, stroking his short beard. “You are aware of those who are not within the capital, yes? Surely a missive would ameliorate any such issues?”

The queen offered an aggravated shake of her head. “I am, of course. Those families have vassal families, and direct contact between the royal family and those vassals that does not involve their patrons will complicate matters.”

“I see. A problem indeed,” Espiridion replied, a similar expression of dismay on his face.

While the royal family held much power within Capua, the country was fundamentally feudalistic. The feudal lords were half-independent and the more influential of them had subordinate nobles of their own, vassal families. As a rule, Aura had no right to command them; they followed only their patron’s orders.

Said patron families would, naturally, be none too happy about relations between those vassal families and the royal family bypassing them. The actions being taken in good faith was no guarantee it would end well.

All the royal family could do was contact the vassals through their patron

families. If said families held some reservations about their vassals, there would be nothing more the royal family could do.

“In which case, perhaps an extension to the deadline for those nobles who did not receive the information in a timely fashion might be a solution,” Fabio suggested.

Aura instantly shook her head. “No. The deadline will be a year, without exception. Allowing any more time will likely see people with plots of their own coming out of the woodwork.”

The duplicate of the register that those affected would need to bring was a signed document from the late king, but given sufficient time, it was not impossible to forge one. Further worsening matters was that the omitted names were from wartime. The widespread war had allowed commoners who had distinguished themselves to rise in station. It was entirely possible that influential feudal lords would take this opportunity to falsify a copy and gain more vassals who could act in their interests.

Embarrassingly, there was also the potential for second sons and daughters of poorer families who had been unable to become nobility themselves to be tempted to take similar actions. Knight families of the lowest class often only registered their likely heirs—their first sons—and good-looking daughters who would be obligated to marry into other noble families, allowing their other children to fall to commoner status. There were many possible reasons for such choices, but the biggest was without a doubt the fee to register a name. The registration fee was enough that fringe nobles would have to tearfully give up on their children’s futures.

The allure of re-registration with a copy of the register signed by Sancho I was impossible to overstate for those people.

“In which case,” the mage continued, “there will be a risk of people falling through the cracks. Unless you have a plan?”

Aura nodded. “I do. I intend to be significantly more flexible with everything other than the date. I am also planning for road maintenance to take place on a date convenient for these considerations.”

It was likely that some defect would occur on the roads throughout the

Kingdom of Capua after the rainy season. Roads becoming partial bogs with standing water due to gutters being buried were the best case, but it was relatively common for mountain passes to become blocked by landslides.

It went without saying that those landslides were the most serious matters, but the greater impact came from big roads like the salt road getting bogged down. There was a limit to the number of engineers she could dispatch, so her priorities had to be decided by the greatest impact that they would have on the country as a whole.

That meant that even though the effects on the people were more severe, landslides were deferred or delegated to the people in those areas, as they were fewer in number. However, it was essential that those omitted from the register would be able to get to the capital.

“Allowing nobles to lose their status due to a simple blockage in traffic when it was the royal family’s failure will inevitably lessen any sympathy towards us. If the worst should come to pass, I will send you. I am aware that it would be hard work, but please be ready.”

The elderly mage gave an exaggerated shrug at her statement along with a deep sigh. “Ahh, I understand. If Your Majesty wishes it, then I will lend my old bones.”

There was a tendency for people with vast mana reserves to struggle with small-scale magic, but there were a small number of exceptions. Espiridion was an exception even among them, having a huge array of spells and abundant mana to use them. If the need took him, he could make a show of power that would put even an engineering group to shame. He could make a road covered by a landslide at least passable within a day.

“My thanks.”

Espiridion gave a small smile and nod. Aura decided that they were done discussing the register and continued on to the next topic.

“Now, I believe knowledge of my pregnancy has spread throughout the palace, but what has the reaction been like?”

Strictly speaking, the doctor had only said that it was highly likely, but nobles

weren't well-behaved enough to patiently wait for it to be confirmed.

Margarette delivered her calm report. "The general view is the same as last time. The main aim is preparing a concubine for Sir Zenjirou, with the next being a second wet nurse. Naturally, the more influential nobles are preparing for both simultaneously."

"Indeed, I would prefer someone as suited as Cassandra was when Carlos was born, but I have no such leads."

There was a conflicted look on her face as she spoke. Cassandra was her son, Prince Carlos's, wet nurse. While she was not higher nobility, she was trustworthy in character and had three children of her own and had been perfect. Unfortunately, she was not highly educated and would be unable to continue once the child had been weaned. Would Aura be able to find a second wet nurse she could entrust her newborn to as unconcernedly as she had with Cassandra?

Seemingly unable to hide her unease, she unconsciously placed a hand on her still-flat abdomen. Seeing her actions, the secretary's eyebrow rose as he spoke frankly.

"Indeed. In that respect, all we can do is choose the best option when the time comes. Their main goal is not the wet nurse position, but that of Sir Zenjirou's concubine. We should focus on that, I think."

Aura gave a shallow nod. "We should; that is the larger problem. I had hoped Princess Freya would serve as a deterrent of some kind. Has there been any sign of that?"

The Northern princess had practically proposed to Zenjirou in public. Afterwards, Aura had not separated the two and had even supported her participation in the Gaziel marriage as Zenjirou's partner, so the palace would see a union between them as being a matter of time.

Aura was asking whether the presence of someone who was practically already his concubine had made others restrain themselves, but the maid shook her head emotionlessly. "Unfortunately, her presence appears to be accelerating matters, if anything. To be frank, they are far more ardent in their efforts than before."

During Aura's first pregnancy, it had been assumed that Zenjirou's type was "women like Aura." Crassly put, her charm was in her height and figure. However, there were very few women of what this world considered marriageable age—between fifteen and twenty—who possessed those attributes.

For her part, Freya was in her late teens and was beautiful. Her short hair and tendency to wear men's clothes and engage in outdoor activities were somewhat off the mark, but if Freya was within Zenjirou's preferences, then it made things much easier.

With the nobles assuming they need only prepare a charming girl of marriageable age, they had a much wider pool to draw from. Understanding the explanation, Aura gave a deep sigh.

"I see, then it would seem that perhaps his efforts are for the best," she mused.

"I heard that Sir Zenjirou was working rather hard, but has it been to such an extent?"

There was a bitter look on Aura's face at the question, but at the same time, she could not keep a hint of happiness from her expression.

"Indeed, the day he discovered my pregnancy was likely when he began to pour almost all of his free time into the practice of teleportation. He can already recite the chant without issue, and there are no problems with his control either. All that remains is for him to manage the correct visualization to succeed. It would appear that it is almost certain he will do so before I deliver our second child."

"My, his feelings for you are strong indeed, Your Majesty," said Espiridion with a teasing tone.

Despite her cheeks flushing, the queen threw her shoulders back proudly. "It would seem so. I worry about the burden upon him, but there are benefits to his business as well. As the queen's husband, his determination to learn teleportation and ensure he can call upon a healer from the Twin Kingdoms before the delivery means that he can keep his public appearances to a minimum."

Usually, the only thing Zenjirou would outright refuse despite his usual—almost worrying—level of reasonableness was a concubine. Having a legitimate reason to avoid any of that pressure was a good thing.

Still, Fabio kept his usual expressionless look as he voiced his concerns. “However, when your pregnancy is certain, there will inevitably be a shortage of manpower afterwards. If we assume that you will be in a similar state as your prior pregnancy, we cannot expect you to be capable of carrying out your usual duties. Sir Zenjirou filled the gap last time, but if he is prioritizing learning magic, there will be political stagnation.”

“You are quite right. We shall have to pray that he can complete his studies before my morning sickness worsens to the point where it interferes with my duties.”

“Will Sir Zenjirou not be leaving for the Twin Kingdoms once he has completed his training? That would lead to an even greater shortage, would it not?”

Aura shook her head plainly in response to the secretary’s concerns. “Of course not. We have only just entered the rainy season, and the blazing season awaits us after. Neither of those are suited to long-distance travel. He will only travel half a year from now at the earliest.”

These were things she had discussed with him already. Even if Aura sent him via teleportation, everyone else would need to travel by land. It was difficult for any but the most veteran travelers to go by road to the Twin Kingdoms during either the rainy or blazing season.

The secretary gave a nod of acknowledgment. “I see; I suppose not even Sir Zenjirou would be so unreasonable.”

“You say that, but my husband is an extremely considerate person. He is very rarely unreasonable to begin with.” There was a doubtful look in her eye as she looked his way, a statement that he should already know this.

Fabio spoke in his defense with a raised eyebrow. “Sir Zenjirou is indeed exceedingly considerate and rational in the majority of circumstances; however, that is not the case when it concerns your safety, from what I have seen.”

While it was not said in an altogether positive way, she could not be happier with the statement. Her usually logical husband discarding that rationality when it concerned her and acting more emotionally let her feel the depths of his affection for her.

She offered a slight smile with an expression of mixed embarrassment and pride. “There is the matter of the register now, the eradication of the swarm raptors in Valentia, and also the glass and liquor manufacturing taking place in the gardens, though you are not yet aware of the extent of those last two. I feel as if my husband’s achievements are reaching the point where they cannot remain hidden, but what do you say?” she asked the blonde maid.

The woman took a half step forward. “It is as you fear. Each time Sir Zenjirou achieves something, more people—though very few each time—spread the rumor that you are stifling your husband. Fortunately, Sir Zenjirou himself is aware of this and denies such rumors any time he becomes aware of them. This has thus far kept it from being a major issue, but the general feeling is certainly strengthening.”

Aura’s position as queen was an unnatural one in their patriarchal society. Zenjirou showing a degree of competency would naturally cause such claims.

Of course, calls against such a thing were even stronger. Accepting Zenjirou as royalty was one thing, but with his upbringing being unclear despite his lineage, many felt that actually placing him on the throne would be absurd.

The practical problem remained, though. Each time a female monarch fell pregnant or delivered a child, the government would stagnate. With the political slowdown happening both last time and this time, there would inevitably be more people voicing doubts about having a female monarch.

The queen could see such a future writ large, so she made a decision. “Things cannot go on as they are or we invite the risk of a future collapse. It galls me, but I will need to appoint a marshal and prime minister.”

The highest ranks in both the military and governmental arms of Capua, those being the posts of marshal and prime minister, were currently vacant. This was due to Aura being unwilling to lessen her own power. She had kept a grip on the right to make the final decision in both military and political matters, and she

had possessed the ability to see it all function. Until now. Her pregnancy meant that even she could not keep both plates spinning alone.

“I see, and is that why you are granting Sir Zenjirou a title?” Despite the suddenness of the queen’s statement, the secretary immediately understood her reasoning.

Aura nodded, a hard look in her eyes. “It is. He is currently only a member of the royal family, incapable of sitting in court without being my proxy. However, a title will allow him to sit alongside me.”

A marshal and prime minister would lessen the amount of work Aura had. It would also be equivalent to decreasing her personal influence. It was all too easy to imagine her word in court becoming less powerful in response.

That therefore gave meaning to Zenjirou gaining a title. With a title, he could participate under those auspices. Naturally, she did not expect him to be able to verbally spar with high-ranking nobles, but even a guaranteed vote in her corner would be helpful.

The secretary gave an admiring nod, followed by two more as he understood her goals before letting his cynical tongue run free. “I see. A logical sequence of affairs indeed. The nobility as a whole will welcome a marshal and prime minister even as it lightens your workload. If you can maintain your influence at the same time, then only a single person need take a loss. A truly brilliant plan.”

Who that “single person” was went without saying. Zenjirou would get a prestige title with land, and all he would gain from it would be more work.

“I have gotten his approval.”

“But of course, Sir Zenjirou is such a considerate person that a minor detriment to himself is something he can easily accept if it helps you. Remember, though, Your Majesty, that every person has their limits.”

“I understand,” she answered, a sour look on her face to match the secretary’s harsh advice.

He was not incorrect, in fact. Zenjirou remaining in a lower political position was something he didn’t need to “endure” but rather something he didn’t see as a hardship. The issues that would come with his title, however, would be

something that he had to endure, despite knowing they were necessary.

There was a clear difference between the former and latter. The former was something that to most would be a trial, but Zenjirou's values made it a complete nonissue, so it barely needed consideration. However, the latter would doubtless be a burden on him. It would be a tolerable burden, though, that he'd happily accept to make his beloved wife comfortable. If she were to forget the prerequisite that he would be burdened and take his devotion as a matter of course, it would cause fractures in their pleasant marriage.

"I am, of course, aware of that." Due to all that, she repeated herself, this time in a murmur, speaking more to herself than the others.

Intermission 1 — Amanda's Advice

One day, during the rainy season proper, Margrave Miguel Gaziel was meeting Head Maid Amanda in a room of the royal palace.

"It's been a while, Amanda."

"It has. I see you are as hale as ever, Sir Miguel."

The older margrave and middle-aged maid exchanged friendly greetings. Amanda was actually related to the man. More precisely, she was the prior margrave's younger brother's daughter, so she was the current margrave's cousin.

"My apologies; I know how difficult it can be for you to come to the royal palace considering your position, and yet you have humored me regardless."

The head maid's usual harsh expression softened as she shook her head in response to his apology. "Not at all. Fortunately, Her Majesty has a reasonable degree of trust in me, so leaving the inner palace itself is not so difficult. Aside from that, I relish the opportunity to see you. Tell me, how is he?"

For a married woman like Amanda to speak so casually of a man, the "he" in question was obviously her husband.

"He's well. Of course, the issues with the register represented no small burden on Severo. While he's well now, I have heard him complaining that he lost no weight despite the amount of stress."

"I can almost see it," Amanda chuckled happily as she heard what her husband of over twenty years was up to.

Her children had all already come of age, and she had the momentous role of head maid in the inner palace, so she missed her family after not having seen them for more than a year.

"If he is well now, then Lady Nilda's problems must have been solved without issue," she offered with a slight smile.

“They have, I was shocked when I was informed, but thankfully there were no real problems before it was solved, all thanks to Sir Zenjirou.”

“That is good to hear. Will Lady Nilda be remaining in the capital, then?”

“She will. Everything she lays eyes on is new to her, and she is spending her time busily exploring the estate. I know I ought to scold her, but I do not know how.”

He was more than capable of remonstrating subordinates in the army but was lost here.

“Now you understand the benefit you had with Lady Lucinda.”

The margrave gave an almost sulky huff in answer to her teasing. “I knew the value she brought even while she was here. It feels too soon to lose her, though. I wasn’t ready, in many ways.”

“She dealt with the march and caring for her siblings as well as teaching them. She did it all, did she not?”

“Indeed. That teaching is the issue, though. As you know, Nilda was brought up in the village until she was nine, so I find it difficult to call her training complete. Of course, as evidenced by making it through the audience in the royal palace, she has the bare minimum of skill in that regard, but I am still concerned. With Lucinda marrying, there is no one in my lands who can teach her.”

“I see, so that is why you asked me here.” Amanda nodded deeply in understanding.

“That’s right. I regret it being necessary to immediately delegate this, but unfortunately, my social circles are limited. So, Amanda, is there anyone suitable in your own circle?”

The talented woman directed her gaze at the ceiling as she considered her family head’s request. “Allow me to confirm: you wish for Lady Nilda to be trained as a lady of the Gaziel family, correct? That limits the number of suitable families even within the capital.”

The margrave offered a word of agreement. His family was one of the

foremost in the country at present, so it was practically inevitable that the numbers were limited. Regardless, Amanda could still offer some of those suitable names.

“The first person who comes to mind would be Count Márquez’s wife, Lady Octavia. Her disposition and behavior are large parts of her fame as a flower of noble society alongside her looks, and she is the best example a lady could follow. She taught Sir Zenjirou etiquette and led his initial lessons in magic, so I can vouch personally for her skill in instruction.”

A reluctant look made its way onto the margrave’s face when he heard Octavia’s name. “Lady Octavia would be more than good enough...but I would rather avoid any debt to the count. He always ends up being the one owed at the negotiating table, even when he’s asking for a favor. This would be me asking him, and I cannot help but fear the results of such a thing.”

The two moved in the same circles, but the ways in which they did so could not have been more different.

The margrave was an upfront military man, often called un-noble-like, while the count worked with honeyed words and leading conversations, so interacting with the man would certainly be a hefty weight for the margrave.

Pathetic though the reason may have sounded, it also left no room for disagreement. Smiling ruefully, Amanda offered her next suggestion.

“Then perhaps Countess Albéniz. She can be harsh but has a commensurate reputation for instructing girls.”

“No, I could not allow the environment to be too harsh. Lucinda may have laid the groundwork, but Nilda was still brought up in the village. I dread to think of her betraying herself in some way I have yet to imagine. They need to have a certain leniency.”

“Then perhaps Marquis Lara’s wife? She does not live within the capital, so you would need to send Nilda to their lands, but she has both strictness and tolerance. I wager you would not find a better instructor. After all, she was Her Majesty’s wet nurse.”

“No, they are perfectionists. I fear they would not return her until her

manners were perfect. Above all, she would be lonely.”

“Goodness...then perhaps you should ask the Guilléns? If you were to send her as Lady Lucinda’s personal maid, it would likely end with her being responsible for her sister once again.”

“I am loath to place any further burden on her. I not only almost condemned her to spinsterhood, but had her support the family on top of that. Making that duty follow her to her new family would worsen her position.”

Amanda’s expression vanished as he merely offered repeated denials.

“My apologies for my selfishness despite asking you for a favor,” he said.

Despite her older cousin feeling ashamed, she still dealt with him earnestly. “Let us evaluate matters. Firstly, what are the absolute requirements for her teaching? Tell me all of them.”

Miguel carefully thought it over before he answered her question. “Well, the first requirement would be that her instructor is sufficiently cultured to train a daughter of a margrave. They would also need to be lenient enough to allow issues that Nilda’s village upbringing might cause. Further, I would prefer them to be based in the capital so that I can rush over and apologize if the need arrives. I would *like* for them to also be kind enough that they would not scowl her into submission.”

Each of his requirements individually were not unreasonable, but they became unreasonably difficult when combined. The chosen noble needed to be capable of training a high-ranking noble and permit a certain level of strange behavior. There were of course many nobles within the capital. Gentle nobles among them, even. However, there were exceedingly few who fulfilled all of those conditions.

If he had to pick *someone*, the ideal candidate would be Amanda’s first suggestion, but the sly old fox would wring some debt out of it, and he dreaded to consider it.

“It is too difficult, I suppose.”

It seemed he would have to engage in his least favorite activity with his least favorite person. Just as the margrave had made that decision, Amanda spoke.

“No, I do actually have another suggestion,” she offered, surpassing his expectations.

“Who?”

Amanda answered his shocked question nonchalantly. “Why, myself. Would you be against me acting in that role?”

She had a slight smile, having caught him completely off his guard. Bewildered, he questioned her.

“But, wait. Do you mean to resign from your post? I cannot ask *that* of you.”

However, Amanda shook her head. “Not at all. My suggestion is quite the opposite. What would your thoughts be as to having Lady Nilda work within the inner palace as a maid?”

“As a maid?! But—”

“Of course, we can only nominate her; her acceptance would be up to Her Majesty. Fortunately, we need more maids, so I feel like the opportunity is there.”

“Hmm, your direct tutelage would be the best I could hope for, but I cannot erase my unease when I consider Nilda doing something that may offend either of the resident royals.”

In a certain light, his worries were inevitable. Ordinarily, the maids were chosen from the best of the best, women who already had perfect etiquette and comportment. It was not an environment in which to *learn* those manners.

Of course, that was simply the general image of things. Personality, standing, background, and trustworthiness were far more important than their skills and manners, but with the margrave’s removal from the politics of the matter, he was unaware of that.

“Your worries are understandable, but I wager they are unfounded in this instance. As far as I am aware, there are no nobles or royals on the Southern Continent more forgiving of unintentional rudeness or failures than Sir Zenjirou.”

“Hmm...I see.”

The margrave's estimation of Zenjirou rose even further. The man was of the opinion that such strict adherence was unnecessary outside of the military, preferring superiors who were tolerant over being slaves to discipline.

Of course, that was merely his own preference, and there were many people who would be quite concerned instead. Either way, if he was to believe Amanda's statement, the inner palace sounded like a reasonable environment for Nilda.

"Very well, then I shall send a letter of recommendation for Nilda to Her Majesty."

He seemed relieved, as if all his issues had been solved, but Amanda did not forget to warn him.

"This goes without saying, but her acceptance or refusal is solely based on Her Majesty's decision. If things fall through, then you will need to investigate the next best option in the form of Lady Octavia. Keep that in mind."

"I...will," the older man answered, making a face like he'd just bitten into a lemon.



A carriage drawn by two drakes made its way through the driving rain along a road in the capital. While the stone-paved and maintained nature of it meant that it was no less passable during the rainy season, it was still a fact that there were few pedestrians out and about.

Rich nobles like Margrave Gaziel used sturdy covered carriages to move around, so the rainy season had a minimal effect on them, but people like that were rare compared to the population as a whole.

Due to the higher concentration of nobles, the capital had a commensurately higher level of carriage traffic. That then meant there needed to be a specialist job for people to clean up the dung the dash drakes left behind. However, working that job in the rainy season paid double the wages of the active season. It was an eye-watering amount of money for a day's work, but there still wasn't a particular surplus of people employed for that purpose during the rainy season.

Then again, considering the misery of roaming the huge capital and scraping up drake dung mixed with water while being deluged with rain yourself, it was perhaps understandable that people would feel the need to avoid it despite the higher wages.

A high noble like the margrave, however, was unable to understand the laments of the lower classes in that way. The carriage he was riding clattered along the roads away from the royal palace and back to his own estate.

“I have returned,” he announced.

“Welcome home, milord,” answered the keeper of the estate—Severo—having come to the entrance to greet him.

Severo had a plump constitution and a bowl haircut, his fringe falling in a straight line across his forehead. His mere presence seemed to make the area more at ease as he gave off a constant air of good-naturedness.

“My thanks for coming to greet me, Severo. Amanda seems well; she asked after you.”

Hearing his lord mention how his beloved wife was doing, Severo’s round face broke into a smile.

“Oh, she did? What did you tell her, my lord?”

“What else than that you were complaining you had lost no weight despite the stress?”

“Milord...why would you purposefully tell my wife of my failings?” he asked with an aggrieved glare.

The margrave shrugged with a slight laugh. “Because she asked, of course. She actually seemed perfectly happy to hear it.”

“Truly, milord, you should have some more sympathy for your subordinates.” His plump face twisted into a scowl that had no real weight behind it as he criticized his liege.

Miguel Gaziel burst into laughter. “Maybe so. I’ll tuck that thought into my mind.”

“Though with your memory, I wager it will come tumbling right back out again.”

While the manner of speech itself was that of lord and servant, the chat was rather relaxed. The margrave and retainer were rather close.

As both parties continued cracking jokes while keeping to the decorum expected of them, they heard some pattering footsteps from inside the estate.

“Welcome home, father.”

The greeting was given with a wide smile from his second daughter—Nilda Gaziell—as she came into view. Her slight stature and baby face made her look younger than she actually was, but she was fifteen years old and therefore treated as an adult in Capua.

“I am glad to see you, Nilda.”

His daughter’s innocent smile made even his craggy face soften. Her birth and upbringing in the village coupled with both the quirk of fate of her becoming nobility after she’d already matured and the type of people she had lived around made her almost scarily affable and innocent.

The margrave himself, while concerned about her lack of wariness, also saw it as a benefit, given how that innocence soothed him.

“So? Have you written your letter?” he asked, recalling the assignment he had assigned her before leaving.

The letter was to Zenjirou. She had been verbally promised a tour of the palace by him if she ever visited. The letter was to confirm whether it had been said out of social obligation or if it was a genuine offer.

She smiled proudly before looking up at him with big, dark eyes. “I have. Would you like to see it?”

“I would. Bring it here.”

“Right away!”

The girl scampered back off at her father’s statement. While her pace was perhaps a little fast, her gait itself, along with the way she held her dress and other such things, were good enough for a woman of her standing.

“Hmm, perhaps she will not cause any embarrassment,” he mused.

However, Severo rejected his liege’s words with a sigh. “How can you say that, milord?”

“Hm? Quite easily. Her actions seem like a woman’s. Do you have issues with them?” The man was quite aware that he was rather divorced from etiquette in general, so he was somewhat uneasy as he asked for his retainer’s opinion.

Severo placed his thumb and middle finger against his temples, rubbing them in apparent despair before offering his thoughts, free of rebuke. “While the way she acts and speaks is sufficient, there is a more fundamental problem. Why would the margrave’s daughter of all people go to fetch a letter *herself*? What does she think the attendants of the estate are here for?”

“Em...”

As Miguel offered a shocked noise, Severo’s voice took on a tinge of censure.

“Could this perhaps be a bad influence, milord?”

“Well...”

He was aware of it himself and let his eyes wander. Severo was right on the mark. The margrave was awfully happy to work in relation to his standing. He felt that relying on others for anything and everything was pointless, so he did whatever he could on his own.

With Nilda’s upbringing, doing things for herself was a matter of course, but the margrave’s influence on top of that made it hardly surprising that she’d forget to make use of the people who were there to serve those roles.

“Hrm, in that respect, having her act as a maid in the inner palace might actually be detrimental,” he murmured to himself.

“Milord?” Severo asked. Miguel had been quiet enough that even from his close proximity, the other man had been unable to catch what had been said.

“I will explain later. I want your thoughts on it as well.”

“Understood, sir.”

As the exchange finished, Nilda came back on pattering feet. She was holding

a sheet of drake parchment about the size of a postcard.

“Here it is, father.”

“I shall have a look.”

He took the sheet from her and directed his gaze at it. The postcard-sized sheet was not overly full of letters. There was Zenjirou’s name—with an honorific attached—a seasonal greeting, and then the question of whether she could prevail upon him to fulfill the promise he’d made. There was then an apology for writing so suddenly with it all being finished off with her own name.

Divorced from etiquette as he may be, he could still pull off the bare minimum. Enough to be able to tell whether the letter was courteous enough or whether it was written poorly. The brevity meant that it did not take particularly long to check.

“This should be fine,” he said, handing it back to his daughter.

“Really?” Nilda asked, her hitherto uneasy expression becoming a wide smile.

“Yes. While there *are* improvements that could be made, this will be sufficient to send to Sir Zenjirou. Well done, Nilda.”

“Thank you!” she replied joyfully.

Her reaction made him remember Lucinda’s words as she had left the family: “If she achieves anything, no matter how minor, please praise her verbally. She was raised as a commoner for quite some time, so she is deeply concerned about whether what she is doing is right or not.”

Feeling the absence of his eldest daughter even more keenly, the margrave spoke to his second.

“I am impressed by the amount of effort you have put in considering your dislike of study. Are you looking forward to it that much?”

“I am. The courtyards apparently have beautiful water fountains and lots of golden fish, so I’m very much looking forward to it.”

“I see,” he answered with a reluctant chuckle.

He had wondered whether she was trying to forge a connection with the

prince consort, and therefore the royal family, but it seemed her priorities were more childish than he'd believed.

“That sounds fun indeed,” he said instead of anything else, deciding it would be rude to say anything else and basking in the glow of her bright smile.

Chapter 2 — Nilda Gaziel — 2

It should go without saying, but it being the rainy season did not signify three months of constant downpour. If you were lucky, there would be several consecutive days with no rain at all, albeit with heavy cloud cover. If you were even luckier, the clouds would not be blanketing the sky.

It was currently the afternoon on one of those rare clear days. Zenjirou was walking through the palace's courtyards with two girls. Multiple days of rain could see even those areas become nothing more than mud, with the plants ruined, but the skilled gardeners affiliated with the royal family dealt with that. Therefore, despite being the height of the rainy season, the gardens were still beautiful.

The dark-haired girl—Nilda Gaziel—was seeing that beauty for the first time, and she was exclaiming in wonder.

“Wow! Incredible! This is amazing, Sir Zenjirou!”

“I am glad that you think so,” he answered, a smile curving his lips as he listened to her effusive joy.

She wasn't watching her step, most of her attention being on a fountain, but fortunately there had been no rain for the past few days, so even under the plant cover it was relatively dry.

It would be awful if she *were* to fall, however, so he decided to give her a gentle warning. Before he could, though, the other girl spoke to her with a laugh.

“Nilda, you need to watch what your feet are doing,” said the silver-haired girl.

“Oh, my apologies for the unsightly display, Princess Freya.”

The silver-haired girl—Freya—had brought her back down to earth, and Nilda straightened herself up.

The complete about-face from rushing around to holding herself straight reminded Zenjirou of a well-trained but energetic puppy, making him smile all the more.

Whoa, watch out there, he told himself, bringing his wariness back up from where it had relaxed. *I'll end up getting too close if I'm not careful.*

There was a commonality with Bona there; interacting with Nilda made him lose his habitual vigilance. He had been careless in inviting a girl who was—at least technically—an adult to the royal palace.

He'd never said it would just be the two of them, which allowed him to get away with having Freya there, but Nilda hadn't had any such designs to begin with and seemed genuinely happy to see her. They had gotten quite friendly during the incident in the march, so things had worked out well.

While the various guards—Zenjirou's knight Natalio, several soldiers and maids, Freya's guard, Skaji, and some knights from the Gaziel family to guard Nilda—watched over them, Zenjirou focused on entertaining the two girls.

"The golden fish I mentioned before are in this pond," he told Nilda. "Would you like to see them?"

"I would!"

"Golden fish? That sounds intriguing," Freya added as Zenjirou led them both to the pond.

"There. The water is shallow, so it should not be dangerous. There is no fence, though, so be careful as you get close."

"I will; thank you for the warning," Nilda answered. She stood at the edge of the pond and looked in at the fish swimming under the surface.

"Wow...gorgeous!"



The sight was rather pleasant indeed. The fish themselves were around the size of an adult's longest finger, but the sheer number of them made the water sparkle.

The difference in their level of instruction was likely the reason Freya wasn't quite so taken, but she seemed interested enough, leaning forward to peer through the water.

"The fish here truly are vivid. It is a surprise," she said.

His conversations with Freya had given him the vague impression that birds and fish were plainer the farther north you went and more vivid as you went to the south, so he decided to question it.

"Are there no fish kept like this on the Northern Continent?"

"There are not. At the very least, I have never before seen a fish I would call 'beautiful,' and such shallow freshwater ponds would freeze to the bottom in the winter."

"Ah, that would make keeping them more difficult. Making the water deeper would interfere with the aesthetic element as well."

"Indeed, so as far as I see it, fish are simply food," she admitted with a self-recriminating smile. "I suppose that shows a certain lack of refinement."

"Not at all. If anything, I am slightly jealous. The capital is inland, so the only fish available to eat are freshwater."

Perhaps as a consequence of growing up in Japan, when Zenjirou thought of edible fish, more than ninety percent of what he imagined were saltwater fish. The freshwater fish that made their way to the dinner table in the inner or royal palaces were by no means lacking in flavor, but there was a distinct taste to them, and he preferred saltwater fish. Nilda pivoted back to join the conversation between the two royals with a friendly smile.

"I enjoy fish as well. There was a small pond a little ways away when I grew up in the village, about this big. We used to catch and eat small fish from it," she said, gesturing with her hands. If her judgment was to be believed, it wasn't more than thirty centimeters deep or wide, small enough for a child to cross.

Even the smallest of villages would likely have more water, Zenjirou thought. After all, wouldn't it dry up when it got to the blazing season?

"Did no one suggest widening it? I would have assumed the village would want more water," he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, but then in the rainy season it would lead to crabs and carnivorous sea drakes getting into the village, so it was dangerous."

It seemed the village had excavated other wells to avoid running out of water during the blazing season.

"I see. That is another thing that needs considering, then."

This made him feel even more that he didn't understand the world well enough. *Actually, how does the palace manage its water? We have so much of it, but it can't be from tiny waterways like that, can it?*

Did they use metal nets to block off dangerous creatures, perhaps? He knew well enough that as the nominal lord of the palace, it wasn't a question he could ask around another country's princess or his own country's nobility.

I guess I'll ask Aura later, he decided.

While Zenjirou had been considering that, Nilda's sharp eyes had caught sight of a building.

"Um, Sir Zenjirou, what is that building?" she asked, pointing.

It was a ways away and surrounded by trees, so it was hard to see any details, but it did look out of place. Ponds, fountains, gazebos, and so on—whatever their size, there was care paid to their appearance, and among the many beautiful constructions, the plain log building looked wrong.

Realizing that, Zenjirou's smile was slightly conflicted, but there was no real reason to hide it, so he explained. "Ah, that is the goat pen. My apologies, but I cannot guide you there."

"The goat pen?" Nilda asked, her head tilting. It seemed the word "goat" was not part of her vocabulary.

The soul of language was working without issue, but it was a word likely to be outside of the general lexicon of this region of Randlion, so a girl from the

borders like Nilda would not have heard of those animals before.

“They are a type of livestock from the Northern Continent. Princess Freya here was kind enough to offer them as a gift, so this is the first time they have been reared in our lands. They need to be away from people as much as possible until they are used to their new environment.”

The specialist they had borrowed from Freya—Nicolai—was putting his all into caring for them, and the characteristic stench of the milk that arrived in the inner palace had been significantly reduced.

The breeding itself seemed to be going well, with several goats having been birthed within the pen already.

However, Freya had some concerns. “This long period of rain was a shock to us, so I am somewhat worried. The pen itself was built to Nicolai’s specifications, so there should be no major issues, though.”

“Oh, you’re worried?” Zenjirou asked, his surprise making him forget his royal style of speech.

Nilda beat Zenjirou to the punch in asking the question, having completely passed her station to make friends with the princess. “Princess Freya, are these ‘goats’ unable to deal with the rain well?”

The dark eyes staring into Freya’s own pulled a smile from her as she agreed. “They are. While they can subsist on a simple diet and adapt well to the environment they find themselves in, they were originally adapted to live high in the mountains where the weather is dry, so they have a slight weakness to rain and increased humidity. Not to the extent that it could truly *harm* them, though.”

Her careful explanation was directed to Nilda, but the detail made it obvious that she was talking to Zenjirou at the same time. In fact, it was Zenjirou who responded.

“Oh, is that the case? Yes, that could be a concern.”

In Zenjirou’s view, the goats represented a hope of broadening his culinary lifestyle, particularly now that the milk was becoming much easier to drink. If the worst came to pass and he lost them all to some form of skin disease, he

thought he might actually cry.

“Princess, while it would be an imposition, could I request that you ask Nicolai about the situation?”

Nicolai was currently on loan to the Capuan kingdom, but Zenjirou was going through Freya because a mutual trust had yet to be built between them. While their loss would be a tragedy to Zenjirou, he could just cry it off, whereas Nicolai was the specialist, so he could easily end up shouldering the responsibility and ultimately find his head on the chopping block.

Naturally, neither Zenjirou nor Aura thought that bringing livestock to a completely new environment in the form of the Southern Continent was simple, so neither had any intention of handing out such a steep punishment if the worst should come to pass. Still, a royal that Nicolai had thus far had no real connection with telling him to relax and that it would be all right if he failed would be hard for him to believe.

Once Zenjirou explained himself and she understood his concern, Freya smiled calmly and accepted the request.

“Very well. I shall speak to Nicolai soon.”

“Thank you, Princess Freya.”

He’d gotten drawn into a conversation with her, but she was not the guest of honor today; Nilda was. Realizing that, he turned to face the large pair of dark eyes again.

“So, I assume you are getting thirsty? Would you like to take a break in that gazebo?”

“I would; thank you for your concern, Sir Zenjirou,” she answered with a friendly smile.



While Zenjirou was talking to the two guests, Aura was working in a room of the royal palace.

Doctor Michel had just said that he was certain of her pregnancy. Judging by the memories of her last pregnancy, her morning sickness would soon worsen,

and there was a good chance her work efficiency would drop like a stone.

Although she couldn't push herself considering the child growing inside her, she wanted to get as much work done while she still could. The documents currently sitting in front of her were particularly important for an easier childbirth in the future.

"So, let us see what kind of lineup we have for the second recruitment," she muttered to herself, dropping her gaze to examine the parchment.

The documents concerned the applicants for the second set of new arrivals as maids in the inner palace. Several maids had left due to their age or for marriage, so new maids had been recruited several months ago. The first group was now used to working in the inner palace, and the second would soon follow. Fabio had screened them beforehand and rejected those it didn't make sense for her to look at, so there was a surprisingly small number of names.

The queen silently perused the documents as her confidant stood at her side. There weren't many things written within the letters of recommendation. There was the nominee's full name and age, the nominator's full name, and the relationship between the two. Those were the only three required items. The rest was simply the nominator making their case and writing out the nominee's strong suits, but frankly, much of that could be skimmed. The majority of it was fixed phrases, extolling their looks and behavior, and if you believed everything then there would soon be dozens of peerless beauties within Capua.

"Mirella, fourteen, nominated by Count Márquez, niece and uncle. Oh yes, it is around that time."

The words on the first sheet brought the person in question to her mind. One of the two former candidates for her hand, Rafaello Márquez and his family were well ingrained in her memory, so she didn't even need to look at Fabio.

"That will go here," she said, placing the sheet to the right of the desk. Then, she picked up the other documents one after another.

"Isidre, thirteen, nominated by Margrave Vervidess, daughter and father. Laurencia, twelve, nominated by Baron Massana, daughter and father. She is also the younger sister of a former maid, Kisha. Jasmine, sixteen, nominated by Viscount Bonilla, hm?"

While there was no reason to reject any of them, there was also nothing that made them stand out, so they went to the left.

“Next, Louisa, thirteen, nominated by Marquis Lara. Oh, that would mean... Aha, the relationship is written as vassal and liege. Very well, very well. My husband will be working outside of the palace more frequently, so Ines and Margarete alone will not be enough. This one naturally goes over here.”

There was an easy smile on her face as she put the sheet to the right of the desk.

She would be coming back to the parchments again, but there were very few that seemed promising at only a single glance. Anyone who would truly be an issue would have been removed from the running before Aura even saw the sheets, so there were few differences between those who remained.

Eventually, Aura’s mechanical sorting of the papers to the left and right of the desk—mostly to the left—came to a halt when she saw the last sheet.

“Nilda, fifteen, nominated by Margrave Gaziel, father and daughter. He wants Lady Nilda to be a maid in the inner palace?” Somewhat taken aback, the queen finally turned to her confidant standing at her side. “Fabio, what do you think the meaning is behind this? I would hear your thoughts.”

The secretary kept his usual placid expression as she engaged him in conversation, answering dispassionately. “There are usually two main reasons that someone offers their own child to the inner palace. The first is to form connections with the royal family, while the other is to give some level of prestige to their daughter. A noble of the margrave’s stature would usually be aiming for the former, but considering Lady Nilda’s circumstances, the latter seems more likely, I would say.”

“Ah, I can understand her father wishing to grant her some prestige considering those circumstances,” Aura mused, looking up at the ceiling and pressing a hand to her head.

Nilda’s illegitimacy and village upbringing coupled with her absence from the register had all been put on show within the audience hall. As far as unique circumstances went, there were few on the same level. The margrave would also have been smarting after not finding his eldest daughter a husband until

she was past her prime, so she could well understand him wanting to get some kind of guarantee for his second.

Zenjirou's report had told her that she and her father seemed to get on so well that one wouldn't have guessed her circumstances.

After a period of thought, Aura made a decision. "Her upbringing aside, I suppose that in a certain light it was I who brought her absence from the register into public view, so perhaps some compensation is warranted."

The final sheet found its way to the right side of the desk.



That night, the queen and prince consort were carrying out their usual custom of giving a report to each other on what had happened that day, both sitting in the living room in the inner palace. They had eaten and bathed, and both were seated across from each other wearing light sleepwear, relaxing with chilled drinks.

The only difference from the norm were the three maids at Aura's side. Now that her second pregnancy had been confirmed, they were there to ensure her physical safety.

Ordinarily, she would keep them at a distance in deference to Zenjirou's preferences, but Aura was a royal by birth. Having several of the maids by her side ready to receive orders at a moment's notice was more relaxing for her. Usually, Aura bore their absence for Zenjirou's comfort, but when she was pregnant, he bore their presence instead. Neither of them had explicitly suggested that arrangement; it had just happened.

Because of the more relaxing environment, Aura was the first to speak. "Now then, I have something to report first. The candidates for the second group of new maids have been gathered. I have already narrowed them down to the final candidates, and they should arrive in the coming days."

"Got it. The first group is used to things now, so that makes sense," Zenjirou answered.

The first group had joined the palace while Zenjirou was in the Gaziel march, so it felt like they had come almost out of nowhere, but they hadn't gotten in

the way. He had already agreed to scale up the number of maids as the others left and had no reason to go back on his word now.

However, her next statement was *not* something he had expected.

“There is something related to this matter that I wish to warn you of. Nilda will be one of them.”

“Nilda?!”

It was no surprise that he was shocked enough to shout. This was the first instance of someone he already knew joining the inner palace. Confusion and a slight wariness were on his face as Aura continued.

“Oh, there will be no need for you to treat her specially. If anything, you two are perhaps a little close. I want you to avoid treating the *other* maids any differently.”

He was clearly relieved to hear it. “I can get behind that. Whew, that was a surprise. I thought they were already pushing the attack.”

“If that had been the case, I would have rejected the document when I saw it. The margrave seems to simply want his daughter to work here considering her storied past. He wants her to gain the prestige of being a former maid of the inner palace so he can find her a better husband.”

“Oh, so *that’s* his game.”

Zenjirou was already aware of the circumstances of her upbringing, so he could easily understand the thought process. However, not even Aura had realized that the margrave’s main goal was to enable Nilda to complete her instruction in the inner palace because its lord was so kind. That would likely be established in a meeting with Amanda in the future.

“Kay, I’ll be careful on that front.” Zenjirou was fond of the girl and was willing to welcome her at his side as a maid. That dovetailed nicely with his own report on the time they had spent together that day. “There were no real problems on my side of things. Nilda and Princess Freya seemed to enjoy themselves. Frankly, while I don’t think I have the slightest insight into a woman’s feelings, I also think she was here solely to sightsee, not due to any ulterior motive towards me.”

“I see.” Aura nodded with a serious expression. It was a secret to Zenjirou, but one of the maids looking after them had been a subordinate of Margarette’s—someone who acted as an informant. Aura would need to corroborate things with her to gain a perspective not limited by Zenjirou’s own biases, but her current feelings on the matter were in agreement with his. Both Nilda and the margrave seemed like the last people who would use their relationships in such a way to gain influence, so Zenjirou’s opinion was likely correct here.

Yet, that made it all the more necessary for her to warn him. “Very well; then you will need to take extra care when you meet her. While you may feel nothing romantic towards her, she is well-disposed towards you. I may be overthinking it, but the distance you keep with her seems akin to your dynamic with Princess Bona.”

“Er...got it; I’ll be careful.”

Having had his own internal doubts pointed out by his wife, he averted his eyes while accepting the warning.

Aura had not really meant to drive the point too far home. They moved on to the next topic.

“As for other news, bring it here,” Aura said, shifting to look at a maid.

The maid in question simply offered a bow and a brief statement of acknowledgment. She glided over to a corner of the room and retrieved an object wrapped in red cloth. She was carrying it on her own, so it couldn’t have been too heavy.

“Put it there,” the queen ordered with a gesture. “Take care not to break it as you place it down.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She did so, placing the object on the table between the two royals before unwrapping it with practiced movements. Zenjirou couldn’t help but let out a whoop and jumped up as he saw the object. The queen seemed pleased with his reaction, grinning and puffing out her lightly clad chest.

“What say you to the latest fruits of our craftsmen’s labor?”

To sum it up, the object was a glass vase. It sparkled in the light from the lamps arrayed around it, glittering a faint green. Anyone from Earth would immediately peg it as a glass vase; that was how perfect the result was.

It stood unsupported on the flat table, a hole in its top to receive the flowers, with no other holes visible, so it should hold water without leaking. It was still only refined enough to attract earnest questions like “did you make that yourself?” and while it did stand unsupported, the base didn’t appear to be flat, so it invited doubts as to its stability in addition to the whole thing being clearly warped. In Japan, it was doubtful anyone would be willing to purchase it even if it was in a hundred yen store. It was roughly on par with the efforts from the “try-it-yourself corner” of a glass museum—that would be the best you could say about it.

However, Zenjirou’s joy had nothing to do with its form. The main takeaway here was that they had managed to create something that was unmistakably glass. Faint green shadows stretched out across the table from the lamps around the room. The tint it gave to the light was less than you’d see from a soda bottle.

“That’s incredible; they must have worked like mad.”

The queen had a very satisfied look on her face at Zenjirou’s praise. “Indeed. Their futures rest upon it, after all.”

The retired smiths were one thing, but the apprentices they had brought in would have relatively bleak futures if they couldn’t make “glassworker” into a worthy profession. The royal family paid them a minimum wage, so their lifestyle was not in danger, but there would be few women willing to marry a man whose craft seemed to have no future. The profession of glassworker was necessary for them to gain a wife and be able to create a stable household. While a man remained eligible for much longer than a woman, there was still a clear time limit.

Aura had a question and suggestion for him in his moment of wonder. “I would like us to move forward with creating marbles at last. You have some form of plan for creating the spheres, do you not?”

“I do, though it’s not ‘my plan’ so much as something I saw in a museum once.

Give me a minute; it's hard to explain verbally, so I'll draw it out."

As he spoke, Zenjirou rose and headed for the desk that contained his paper and other stationery.

"Ah, wai—" Aura didn't even have time to finish her statement, ending up with her hand midway through an aborted movement through the air. She could only smile wryly to herself. Her thoughts were along the lines of, *Why would a royal get up on his own to fetch something when there are so many maids in the room?* However, if she put the question to him, Zenjirou's reply would be something like, "Why would I ask someone else to get something that's in the same room?"

It was these little things that really demonstrated the differences in how the two viewed the world. They had managed to maintain a healthy marriage regardless by remembering that these things were normal to each other and respecting each other's views.

Still, the chagrined smile on his wife's face completely passed his notice as he retrieved the drawing materials and returned to the sofa.

"Right, there are two plans: an initial model and a modern one. I'll draw both, but I don't think the modern version's doable since it needs machinery."

As he spoke, Zenjirou started drawing out the tools to create marbles. A period of time passed as he wrestled with it. He didn't have much in the way of artistic talent, so it was difficult for him, but eventually he managed to draw two pictures that would ensure people could understand what he meant as he explained them.

"This is pretty much the shape of things. The first sheet's probably the winner here, but the second's more of a bonus goal that'd be nice if we could manage it."

"Let me see. Ah, yes. The first is easy to understand. You simply drop an appropriate amount of molten glass into this multilayered spiral."

"Yup, that's right. The molten glass ends up naturally spherical as it rolls down the spiral and is mostly solid by the time it reaches the bottom. I *do* think that despite looking simple, it will need a long string of trial and error, so you should

tell the craftsmen to be ready for that.”

The concept was exceedingly simple. You were only rolling molten glass down a metal spiral, but even the slightest thought would reveal countless reasons it might not be so easy. If the glass wasn't viscous enough then it would just smear its way along the surface and be useless. If the incline was too steep, the gob could roll out of the spiral and become useless. Conversely, if it was not steep enough, it would lose steam partway down and deform as it came to a stop, also ending up useless. If the spiral itself had bumps or the like, then the same thing would happen. Contrary to its simple construction, a lot was actually required to build it.

“This is the other one, then? Frankly, it is difficult to understand even with the picture. Do these circles mean the rollers are spinning?”

“Yeah. You spin two rollers with round grooves cut into them at the same rate and drop some glass onto the side. There isn't much space between the two, and it's smaller than the diameter you want, so the glass doesn't fall out and just keeps rolling down the gap. That movement naturally forms a sphere, and it gradually cools to the right size.”

The other sheet of paper depicted the main components of a modern marble-making machine. To use said machine, you'd melt pellets of glass and add the correct amount to the rollers, so as the gob became a sphere, it would be rejected if it deviated but otherwise continue automatically until it cooled.

However, that production line process was likely impossible to reproduce in this world, in addition to being unnecessary in the first place. The main thing they needed was to keep the molten glass in a spherical shape until it solidified. Cutting up the other molten glass and removing inadequate products was something the craftsmen could do by hand.

Modern marbles were a hundred yen for a whole pack, so you would make no profit unless you could produce thousands—or even tens of thousands—at a time, but that wasn't the case here. These marbles could form the basis of magic tools, so on the extreme end of things, even a single marble a day would be enough.

“How are they rotated? By hand?” Aura asked.

“Hm, I think you’d want to use a water wheel. Either way, that only helps if you can manage it, and I think we’d be better off going with the first option for now. If that just won’t work no matter what, then you can suggest the second as an alternative.”

It should go without saying, but Zenjirou was not a specialist in glass or marbles, and he had only ever seen glassworking up close once, on a school trip. Everything else were things he had looked up online or read about in books.

“Hm,” the queen mused, studying them both. Looking at them side by side, even Aura could see that one was much more complicated, despite her own lack of detailed knowledge.

Of course, a simple construction didn’t guarantee that it could be easily replicated—it was just more possible.

“I understand. I will only provide the craftsmen with the first drawing for now. They used to be smiths, so I cannot imagine it will be too difficult for them to make something the right shape, at least.”

If anything, she felt like they’d relish the opportunity to get back to pounding iron again. But she didn’t think it would go that smoothly. Former smiths they might be, but the majority of them had yet to truly mature in their professions, and most had no guarantee of being able to take over a smithy of their own. Even having the retired smiths take the lead, the general skill in smithing would be a grade lower than with most active smiths.

That did not necessarily mean that they should bring that manufacturing process back to the specialized smiths, though. After all, the people adding the molten glass to the device would be the glassworkers. It was all too easy to imagine the misunderstandings that would be created if they outsourced the work to people who had no understanding of glass at all, or what the tool would be used for, especially when it was in the trial phase.

“All right, I’ll leave that bit to you, then,” Zenjirou replied.

“Indeed. I will deal with it.” Aura had finished talking about the glass and looked at the maids at her side again. “Girls, bring the next two things.”

The order didn't fluster the two maids. They just undertook their instructions with calm expressions.

"Right away."

"We will be but a moment."

They moved to a corner of the room in the same way the other woman had earlier and returned with a small cask that could be carried in one hand as well as a round piece of wood that fit in the palm of her hand.

"Excuse us," they said as they passed between the two royals and placed the objects atop the table.

Zenjirou had a rough idea of what they were even at a glance. "Is that a spirit and compass?" he asked, leaning forward.

His wife grinned at him, nodding. "It is. The liquor is the first made at scale for selling, and the compass is the result of giving the craftsmen the drawing you created. The former has been well received at banquets and the like, so a relatively small run puts it in a position where it can be sold in general."

Zenjirou made an impressed noise upon seeing a clear sign of his own culture taking root in this world, but there was still a sliver of unease that he felt. Distillation seemed to already exist on the Northern Continent, so it was probably just a matter of time before it spread to its southern neighbors.

"You," Aura commanded.

"Yes, ma'am," answered the maid at her side, pouring the spirit into the glass that had just been emptied of cold water.

It was colorless and looked like water. Zenjirou immediately picked up the glass and took a cautious sip, letting the liquid roll around on his tongue before swallowing.

"Yup, that's the stuff. I guess there aren't any problems with it," he said, giving his stamp of approval.

It had been about half a year since they had started trying to replicate Zenjirou's efforts with his electric hot plate with contemporary tools. A relatively flavorless and simple spirit was fairly easily made, it seemed.

“If it’s going on sale, does it look like we’ll make a profit?” he asked curiously.

However, Aura shook her head with a scowl. “We will not be profiting at present. If anything, we are at a deficit when you consider the investment for the equipment.”

Zenjirou put his glass back down on the coaster with a sour look of his own at the somewhat expected answer. “Ah, that figures. I guess that’s what happens when the efficiency’s so low.”

“The cost of materials and fuel is the greater problem. Besides, when considering the supply and demand, we arranged things for the rainy season for this run, but I am considering having the next done during the blazing season.”

“Hm? How come?”

Zenjirou couldn’t quite understand why, and realizing this, Aura offered a more detailed explanation.

“The base ingredients for the spirit that I see are the fruit and grain alcohol on the verge of disposal. They are most cheaply obtained during the rainy season, but the fuel needed to actually distill anything is most expensive during the same season. In that respect, the blazing season may be best, but that will mean a shortage of the ingredients themselves.”

“Ah, that’s not an easy one,” Zenjirou offered with a concerned hum now that he understood what she was driving at.

In addition to its high temperature and humidity, Capua didn’t have advanced preservative techniques, so low-percentage alcohol had a rather short shelf life. Unlike most people on Earth, the Capuan population as a whole would just add some spices and sugar if the drink was slightly soured, but there was a limit to how much that could hide the taste.

The drinks went bad particularly easily during the long rains of the rainy season and in the intense heat of the blazing season. It would be difficult to turn those into spirits, so they were after alcohol that was *just about to turn*, which appeared in the greatest quantities in the rainy season. Therefore, the source ingredients were the cheapest at that time.

However, the season inevitably led to supply issues for the firewood and

charcoal needed to fuel the distillation itself. The only firewood that could be used in the rainy season had to be stored inside and protected from the rain, and the firewood that received that treatment rather than just being cut and allowed to weather was more expensive.

Altogether, it meant that the rainy season had the cheapest ingredients but also the steepest rise in fuel prices.

The converse was true in the blazing season. The humidity fell and the temperature rose, so the firewood dropped in price, but the alcohol was harder to get. It was unsurprising; the rainy season was the worst for keeping alcohol, and by then the season would have just passed. The majority of the “almost ruined” alcohol dropped the “almost” by the time the blazing season came around and was no longer a real drink.

It was therefore unavoidable for the alcohol that did remain to command a higher price. There was a resulting drop in price for the fuel but a rise in the material costs.

“Hmm, then what about the active season?” Zenjirou asked. “They produce the new alcohol there, and the firewood won’t be as cheap as the blazing season, but it will still be cheaper. The new batches of alcohol will almost certainly end up with some of it being ‘technically drinkable, but not sellable,’ right? If we buy that up then the material costs will be lower as well, won’t they?”

It seemed like a fairly good idea to him as he suggested it, but Aura bluntly shook her head.

“That will not work. The active season, as well as marking the start of more brewing, is also the busiest period for farmers and craftsmen. When you consider the manpower required, the labor expenses will become our biggest line item.”

“Right, that wouldn’t work then, yeah...”

Zenjirou looked up at the ceiling and sighed. There’d be no point in minimizing the expenditures on the fuel and materials if the labor costs shot up in turn.

Above all else, Capua still wasn't free of the impact of the great war. The country was in the middle of a labor shortage on all fronts, so gathering people for a new industry while the country was in its busiest period would end up with the royal family facing a reasonable amount of backlash.

Zenjirou knew that it was a problem he wouldn't be able to solve thinking it over here, so he moved on to the next item. "All right, so this is the compass?"

"It is. It would seem that the object itself was not particularly difficult to make. The needle in the middle was made by a blacksmith, but the rest was done by a carpenter. I think it meets your specifications, but do you agree?"

Zenjirou picked up the compass and examined it. The central needle was not yet magnetized, so it wasn't strictly speaking a compass yet, but other than that, everything seemed to be in order.

"Let's have a look. Hm..."

He rotated it on its edge and even upside down and gave it a slight shake. Everything other than the needle was made of wood, and there was no glass or plastic in this world, so there was no cover for it. Instead, the wooden pivot the needle rested on had a crosspiece attached to stop the needle from coming off. The needle's center of gravity seemed to be right, and it spun freely when he reached in to flick it. There didn't seem to be any problem with the construction.

"Yeah, that seems fine. I'll magnetize it later. Oh, hang on. How do I get the needle out?"

"Ah, the crosspiece simply holds it in place with friction, so you can just pull it off. If you *do* break it, it is easy to remake the holder, so just pull on it as you please."

"Got it. Oh, that *did* come off easily. How will we hold it together once it's magnetized? I'm not entirely happy leaving it as is," Zenjirou said, holding the disassembled object.

"Perhaps a small nail? Or maybe adhesive?" Aura suggested as if it were obvious. "Either way, I am sure that once we return it to the craftsmen, they will finish it to a high standard."

“Hmm. Oh yeah, we don’t have screws, do we? I gave the merchant a spare, but maybe it’s hard to reproduce?”

“Perhaps it is not impossible but does not appear profitable. A merchant will do nothing unless he sees the benefit.”

“Yeah, that makes sense.”

Satisfied with her explanation, he returned the disassembled compass to the table. The glass, then the spirits, and then finally the compass. Discussing each of the three topics had taken up quite a bit of time.

Zenjiro looked at the clock and then spoke to his beloved wife. “It’s about time you headed to bed. Let’s go wish Zenkichi good night and get some sleep,” he suggested, standing up and offering her his hand.

Aura accepted, taking his hand. “I did not realize it was so late. Very well. Doctor Michel will be rather put out if I burn the midnight oil for too long. What of you, though?”

Having helped her up, Zenjiro kept his hand in hers as he answered. “Once I’ve seen Zenkichi, I’ll stay up for a bit practicing, then go to sleep. It feels like I’m almost there.”

“Dedication is a good thing, but do not push yourself too hard,” she told him with a slightly worried frown.

An unconscious smile found its way to his lips as he agreed. “Got it. I won’t.”

“Very well, then.”

The couple entwined their arms without thinking about it as they left the living room in order to wish their son a good night.

Chapter 3 — Freya Uppasala — 1

The requirements for a successful casting of magic were: correctly pronouncing the incantation, using the correct amount of mana, and finally, the correct mental image.

Zenjirou had been practicing teleportation for several months. He'd succeeded at holding the correct amount of mana while saying the incantation properly, giving him a good chance of casting successfully, so the final hurdle was the visualization.

Aura had judged that Zenjirou was proficient in both the first two requirements, and she'd brought him to a room in the royal palace without any windows where the walls and floor were made of rock.

"Aura, is this..." Zenjirou asked with a look of shock, pivoting his head to take in the room.

Aura gave him a meaningful smile. She was currently wearing a loose, soft dress. It had been three months since her last monthly visitor, but her stomach was not yet visibly bigger, and she hadn't had morning sickness to the same extent as last time. The symptoms could vary from one pregnancy to another, so her experience from the last pregnancy was not entirely helpful. Even when Doctor Michel had said that she was definitely pregnant, he had allowed her to carry out the duties that she could within the palace as long as she remained around her maids.

"So you *do* remember it. Indeed, Zenjirou, this is the room I summoned you to this world in."

The room that Aura's summoning magic had pulled him to from his own world, the place he had first entered this world. It had been three years since his summoning, but he could still recall the shock of the occasion with perfect clarity.

"Man, it's making me kinda nostalgic. It almost feels like the room hasn't even

changed.”

“As well it should. This room was made for exactly that purpose, after all.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” he asked with a puzzled inclination of his head.

“The room was created for the royal family, or users of space-time magic, in order to make using teleportation as easy as possible. Forming a clear mental image for the spell is immensely difficult until you are used to it. This room is the first place we learn to teleport to,” she explained concisely.

He could understand what she was saying, but not why that was the case.

“Wouldn’t it be easier to learn to teleport somewhere familiar first? Like the living room for me?”

She seemed to have expected the question because she shook her head immediately. “Places where you spend much of your time are surprisingly difficult. The spirits will correct for slight discrepancies between your mental image and reality, but there is a limit to that. There are very few rooms that do not change within a year, or even within a day. Also, I would wager few people other than space-time magic users know this, but as you move to the east or west there can be sudden changes in daylight hours, which makes such visualization harder.”

“Ah, right, time zones.”

Zenjirou clapped in understanding at the explanation. Teleportation was, in the end, nothing more than a spell that instantly moved you. It didn’t allow you to travel through time.

As an example, even if it was daylight in Japan, that didn’t mean that if you imagined New York in the daylight, the spell would work. You would need to calculate the time difference and imagine New York at night.

The same would be true for the different seasons. Someone who had only ever been to Hokkaido during the winter would be unable to use teleportation to visit in the summer.

While the explanation had answered most of his objections, he still had questions.

“Hmn? So the spell won’t work if there’s a big enough difference between what you imagine and what’s in reality, right? Then would things like remodeling the room or there being people inside make it fail as well?”

If that was the case, teleporting outside would practically be impossible, and the spell would be much more limited than he had thought.

Despite his doubts, the queen shook her head. “No, changes to that extent are not meaningful on the whole. I once attempted to teleport to my allies and their encampment during the war, and due to a miscommunication arrived after they had already left,” she explained with a smile. “That was a nasty shock.”

“I’d have thought that there’d be more in common between the palace during the rainy and blazing seasons than a camp before and after it’s been vacated,” Zenjirou protested, still not entirely able to accept the explanation.

She chuckled in agreement. “I think much the same, but it does not work in that way. We have no choice but to accept it as fact. I suppose it is impossible that we humans can completely understand the existence of the grand spirits.”

“Yeah, it’s magic; guess it makes sense that it doesn’t make sense.”

Zenjirou hadn’t quite been able to fathom the ease-of-use of the time-reversal magic before and had in the end just decided to accept it as “one of those things.”

“Therefore, I recommend this room as the first place you learn to teleport to. The ability to return to the palace no matter what else cannot be overstated.”

“Got it. Oh, hang on. The palace is the only place that has a room like this, right? I mean, Valentia and Potosi are both royal holdings as well, right? I’d have thought it’d be convenient to have a room in other places like this.”

The queen looked at him questioningly. “Multiple versions of the same room would be pointless due to confusion between them when imagining them.”

“They wouldn’t have to be exactly the same. You could change the oil lamp layout or write the name of the place in big letters on the wall.”

“Hmm... It may be worth considering, but I feel that the risk of confusion is

too great. Once you are somewhat used to the spell and able to maintain an image, it becomes possible to use it with other rooms, but moving within the country itself is not that difficult to begin with. There are no large differences in the time or season in the same country, after all.”

Particularly when you took the capital as the standard, those differences became much smaller. Capua had sufficient land to be considered a large country, so there was a time difference between the west coast and their eastern lands. Still, from the perspective of the capital, which lay between the two extremes, neither difference was a concern.

Assuming the difference between sunrise in both locations was an hour, it would only be thirty minutes in either direction from the capital. If it was daylight within the capital, it would be daylight on both the coast and in the eastern lands. In the same way, if it were nighttime in the capital, it would be night in both other regions as well. Excluding dawn and dusk, there would be no major difference in the image required.

“What about internationally, then? I remember you sending Princess Isabella back to the Twin Kingdoms before.”

“I have visited the Twin Kingdoms on several occasions and have the fortune to have been responsible for that region.”

Her smile as she spoke took on a cast of loneliness. When Capua had had many royals, some of them had taken sojourns to allied neighboring countries to make teleportation between them possible. Aura was the only royal left from that era, so the only countries she could teleport to were ones she had personally visited before. That the indispensable Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle was one of them was most certainly fortunate. However, the fact that the number of visitable countries had been reduced so drastically served as a reminder that every other member of her family had been wiped out.

Noticing her lonely look, Zenjirou gingerly wrapped his arm around her waist to give her an awkward hug.

“Yeah, thanks to that, I can go there as well.”

“Indeed.” She nodded with a soft smile, quietly allowing him to embrace her. “However, my sending you there is absolutely contingent on you learning the

spell yourself. I trust you understand that?”

“Yup, of course.”

If Aura used teleportation to send him there, the trip would be instant. If, however, he hadn’t learned the spell himself, he would have no option but to return by land.

When he had gone to Valentia, Aura had used the spell to retrieve him and then return herself due to it being an emergency. However, such drastic action was only feasible because it was all within the same country.

His initial reason for learning the spell was to ensure he could obtain the promise of aid for their second child before its birth. If he hadn’t learned the spell, there was no longer a reason for him to even go.

Shaking off his thoughts, he took in the room with a new look of determination.

“Right! Then I need to learn it as quickly as possible. The visualization’s all I’ve got left, so I’ll work hard.”

His declaration made, Zenjiro turned to engrave the entire room into his mind, so focused that he was unwilling to even blink.

“Effort is all well and good, but do not stay overlong. The room *is* somewhat ventilated, but there are no windows and several oil lamps burning here,” she warned.

Zenjiro nodded. “Yeah, that’s right. In which case, I’ll go back to the living room and get my camera. If I record the room, then even if I’m not here...” That was as far as he got before he realized his folly. He slumped and let out a groan. “Right, the visualization is the problem. Other spells are one thing, but with teleportation, I can use a photo of the destination to cast it. Why the hell didn’t I realize something that obvious?”

The queen patted him consolingly with a slight quirk on her lips.

“It is a common occurrence when you are focused on something. If anything, I would say it is perhaps for the best that you noticed now.”

“Yeah, probably. Now that I think about it, the pronunciation is one thing, but

I only just got the right amount of mana, so it's not like I've really lost any time."

"Indeed. You do not need to think the worst. You have actually done extremely well. It is ordinarily impossible to do the entire thing with absolutely no wasted time."

"Yeah. I'm not happy about missing something obvious, but it's not exactly unrecoverable, so I shouldn't worry too much about it," he said, bringing his mood back up. He stood up straight and took a deep breath.

"Right. I'll head back and fetch the camera. Once I've finished the recording, I'll call it quits for the day."

"Indeed."

Zenjirou left the room with quick steps, and when he returned, he took several photos and videos of the interior of the room, then left again.



Five days passed. Zenjirou had finished his lunch and was focusing on the last step of learning the spell. He already had cleared two of the three prerequisites to cast it. All that remained was the final one: visualization.

He'd already passed the stage of marking down successful incantations, so he hadn't booted up his computer. He was standing in a corner of the living room, camera in hand as he incanted.

"Send that which I envision to..."

He didn't know how many times he'd made the attempt over the last five days, but when he opened his eyes, the familiar living room was the sight that greeted him.

"No good..."

Even as he spoke, there was no sign of impatience or grief on his face. It was highly subjective, so he couldn't say for sure, but the method of looking at the camera to bolster his visualization felt like it had rocketed him close to success in one go.

"Hmm, I think the pictures are better than the video here. Trying to visualize the room at the same time as watching the video gets distracting. Right, one

more time.”

Fortunately, the magic in this world only used mana if the spell was successful, with no penalties. If the spell didn’t work, it just resulted in a “nothing happened” moment, which in turn meant that as long as the caster had time and focus to spare, they could keep practicing as much as they liked.

Zenjiro gathered all his focus and looked at the image on the camera. It was a dim room in a corner of the palace. There was no illumination from outside; instead, it was constantly lit with flames.

He envisioned standing in the center of them, looking at the wall as the flames flickered over it. Once he had the image fixed in his mind, he quietly closed his eyes. Then he focused on the sensation of externalizing that image, *shifting* his own position to it.

“Send all things in the space that I envision to the place that I desire. As compensation, I offer—”

When Zenjiro finished the incantation and quietly opened his eyes, he was met not with the familiar living room, but a stone room lit by multiple flames.

He could see the shock on the soldiers’ faces even in the darkness as they pushed the spears into the room and looked at him. There was a small, rational part of him conscious of other people watching him, of his position as royalty, but it was completely overwhelmed by the much larger part of him that was awash in emotion.

“Hell yeah! I did it!”

He cheered and leaped into the air with such vigor that the soldiers stepped back. His feet then carried him back to the living room, but even so, his excitement was unabated.

“Yes, yes, yes! I did it! I’m awesome! A real mage!”

He had used two other spells, a barrier and a physical summoning spell, so technically he could already have called himself a mage, but teleportation was a completely different type of magic. In practical terms, neither of the other two spells served a purpose, while teleportation was a dream spell that explosively increased his capabilities.

Zenjirou's half-baked visualization skills meant that while he could not simply visit anywhere he wanted just by going there once like Aura could, he could increase the range of his teleportation ability with the assistance of his camera. Above everything else, this meant that Zenjirou was ready for a visit to the Twin Kingdoms.

"I made it! I made it this time, Aura," he said as he collapsed onto the leather sofa.

Still lying face down, he lifted a fist towards the ceiling. The memory playing in his mind was her first delivery, the birth of their beloved child, Carlos Zenkichi.

While Doctor Michel had said that it had been a steady and comparatively short delivery, Zenjirou couldn't believe it. Her pained cries had seemed to continue forever. He had been unable to do anything other than wait in the next room and listen.

If there had truly been nothing at all that could be done, he could have resigned himself to that. There were healers in this world, though, from the Gilbelle Papacy, able to manipulate magic that let them outstrip even modern medicine. They lived far away, enough that he would have to cross half a continent to get to them, but Zenjirou had the latent ability to negate that distance—the lineal magic of the Capuan royal family. Teleportation was perhaps the prototypical example of the space-time magic they commanded, and if Zenjirou had been able to use it, there would have been a healer there.

That would have resulted in an even safer birth for both his wife and son than even the best that Earth could offer. He, their husband and father, was the only one who could do so, but he'd just coasted through, not having seriously learned magic by then.

That was why he'd felt like ice had been dropped down the back of his shirt when he'd returned from the Gaziel march to be told that their second child might be on its way. A crisis, once past, is too soon forgotten. At some point, he'd forgotten that fear and helplessness and reverted back to his days of leisure, hadn't he? He had wondered if he would be punished for his hubris this time.

Fortunately, fate had been kind enough to remove that possibility.

“I can go to the Twin Kingdoms now! It’ll be okay this time, Aura. I’ll keep you safe this time, so you can relax and have our second child.”

Zenjirou’s eyes shone as he murmured his promise—both with hope for the bright future ahead and conviction to see that future come to pass.

When Aura finished her own work for the day and returned to the inner palace, there was a sunny smile on her face. Her expression alone told him that she’d heard of his achievement.

“So you were successful,” she said shortly, favoring him with a wide smile.

Zenjirou’s smile was equally wide as he pumped his fist. “Yeah, thanks to your help. Honestly, it still doesn’t feel real.”

Aura approached her smiling husband, flanked by a maid on each side. “Everyone feels the same way when they first learn teleportation. After all, it is impossible to try it repeatedly.”

Teleportation was a large spell that someone of Aura’s reserves could barely cast three times in a day, while Zenjirou could only use it twice.

She finished her approach by softly taking his hands in hers. “I had not expected you to succeed so quickly. It is all due to your own unflinching determination. You have worked so hard for me. Thank you.”

“Well, I...” He looked awkwardly around, hands still held in his wife’s.

The more sentimental things like this were usually reserved for when the two of them were alone, but Aura currently had a maid on either side of her to offer support. The young women both had blank expressions as if they heard nothing, but Zenjirou knew otherwise from the long association he’d had with them. They were listening as closely as they could so they could gossip with the others later.

Not like I can control them gossiping.

He therefore wanted to avoid as much embarrassment as he could in front of them, but laughing it off wouldn’t be fair to Aura since she’d gone so far.

“Well, yeah. I worked pretty hard at it. For you.” He had only wanted to learn

the spell as quickly as possible because she was pregnant. “I can go to the Twin Kingdoms now, so you can relax and have our child,” he repeated. Almost desperately, he wound his arms around her.

“Thank you, Zenjirou.”

“You’re welcome.”

He felt and savored her breasts pressing into his own chest through the two sheets of fabric separating them. He usually would have transitioned into a kiss but letting himself go that far in front of the maids was difficult.

Besides, while her stomach had yet to start protruding, there was a new life growing inside it. He couldn’t hold her as tightly as he usually would.

Neither ended up saying any more, simply holding each other to prolong the moment of warmth for as long as possible.



The princess of the Northern Continent’s Kingdom of Uppasala had requested an urgent audience with Zenjirou the day after his success with teleportation.

Zenjirou had learned his third piece of magic, and his first of any practical significance, so he was practically walking on air in a way quite unlike his age, but an emergency request from another country’s royalty had his train of thought switching tracks instantly. Therefore, he had calmed down significantly by the time he met Freya in a room in the royal palace.

“My apologies for the delay, Princess Freya.”

“Not at all. I cannot thank you enough for agreeing to meet with me so quickly, Your Majesty.”

He exchanged the usual greetings with her as they sat on opposite sofas, a slight twinge of doubt making its way through his mind.

She seems awfully calm for an “emergency,” he thought to himself.

While it was dangerous to make assumptions based on a true royal’s expressions and bearing, the converse was also true. If it was truly an emergency, Freya should purposefully make sure her expression conveyed that urgency. Perhaps this wasn’t as serious as he’d assumed.

Zenjirou let the tension leave his shoulders, but it was still an emergency meeting, so wasting time with small talk would be poor manners.

“So, what is this meeting for, Princess?”

Freya smiled happily at his blunt question. “I apologize for the sudden change of plans, but I wish to return to Valentia. Is it possible to get permission to do so?” she asked.

Zenjirou stifled an exclamation as he asked, “Has something happened?”

The silver-haired princess gave a brief nod. “Indeed. I received word from a subordinate who stayed in Valentia. There seems to be a slight issue with the *Glasisir’s Leaf*,” she explained.

“An issue?”

There was a doubtful look on his face regarding the importance of that, but Freya offered him a composed smile along with her response. “It is not so dire that the ship may sink or be impossible to repair. Much to our chagrin, this is the first time we have experienced a rainy season on the Southern Continent, and our initial assumptions seem to have been naive, with work falling significantly behind.”

Someone from the Northern Continent who had never experienced the local climate would find it hard to imagine the current state of affairs even if you told them it would likely rain every one in two or one in three days. That must have led to their planned schedule pulling away from the actual pace of work.

Freya was borrowing the location, materials, and supplementary craftsmen that she didn’t have from Capua in order to repair the *Glasisir’s Leaf*. If work was delayed, she would need to make a request to Aura that the loan be extended. In that case, hearsay was not persuasive enough.

Freya’s claim was that without seeing and hearing the state of things personally, she would be unable to negotiate with Aura.

“I see...” Zenjirou said thoughtfully.

What she said held together well and ought not to impact them negatively at all. She was still a guest of the royal family, though, so leaving the capital would

require the queen's permission.

"I understand the circumstances. I imagine permission would be granted. I will discuss it with Queen Aura within the day, and she should contact you before long."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Freya answered with a smile and bow of her head.

Zenjirou then asked a follow-up question as if he had just thought of it. "For confirmation's sake, will you be going to Valentia alone?"

She pondered for a moment before answering slowly.

"Let me see. Only Skaji and I absolutely *must* go. Naturally, considering the dangers of the road, I would also like to ask for permission for half of my guard force to accompany me."

"I see," Zenjirou answered, turning over her words in his head.

From another angle, if the journey could be guaranteed to be safe, or if there was no *journey* at all, then she could go with just Skaji.

"Very well. I cannot make a firm promise, but I would imagine you will receive a positive answer in the next few days."

"Thank you for your assistance, Your Highness," the princess said with another smile and bow.



That evening, Zenjirou was using the drake parchment used for official documents as well as an unfamiliar drake bone pen as he wrote out words of this world's language.

"Right, that's done. Or it should be. Amanda, can I get you to check this?"

"One moment," the maid said as he handed over the newly written parchment before stretching in his seat.

"Ugh, it's hard writing in this language. And it's not even being sure if I'm doing it right that's the worst bit," he complained.

His reading and writing skills in the local language could by no means be

described as advanced. He used the free time he had to practice, so he had more or less learned it all, but in the same way a Japanese middle schooler had learned English by their third year.

To put it bluntly, his skills were even lower than Nilda Gaziel's, who considered letter writing to be the hardest thing to do. Then again, considering he had been brought up with a completely different language and had only been learning for three years, it was no surprise that his skills were lacking.

Civil officials would usually write on his behalf and then read it out loud, so all that was required was for him to affix his signature. However, he could never progress that way. So to try to improve that state of affairs, he'd started to write documents that were relatively simple or wouldn't have much of an impact if there were mistakes.

This particular document, despite its official status, was something he would hand directly to Aura, so only the two of them and her first secretary, Fabio, would ever read it. Any minor slips he made would not cause serious issues.

"I have finished; there are no problems," Amanda told him.

"Right, thanks," he answered, taking it back and looking over it again. As he did so, the door opened.

"I am back," came the voice of the other head of the inner palace—Aura. Accompanied by several maids as if it were the most natural thing in the world, she entered the room at a relaxed pace.

"Welcome back, Aura. You're done, then." Zenjirou kept hold of the document in one hand as he stood.

"Indeed. Fortunately, I do not have morning sickness to the same extent as with Carlos, but Doctor Michel is insistent that I not push myself," she said before seeing what was in his hand. "Oh? An official document? It is rare that you bring work back to the inner palace."

The prince consort offered the sharp-sighted queen a nod, offering the document to her.



“Yeah, I figured it’d be better to get done quickly, and it’s stuff I could do here anyway. I’ll explain later, but I’d like you to sign that.”

The document was a request for Aura to use teleportation, with Zenjirou’s name as the requester and Freya and Skaji as the recipients.

Aura glanced it over and her expression tightened.

“I would hear the circumstances in detail,” came her initial response.

This was followed by the couple taking seats on opposite sofas and Zenjirou explaining the situation.

“I see. I understand. If the rainy season does not occur on the Northern Continent, it is perhaps unavoidable that they would underestimate the amount of time required. In that respect, it is logical from both a time and safety perspective for me to send the two of them.”

Traveling during the rainy season was difficult, especially for nobles traveling in large, roofed carriages, as the roads that were passable for vehicles were more limited.

The worst outcome was that during the journey, sodden ground and landslides could halt their progress, then further rain could lead to the route back being blocked, trapping the travelers on the road. Such misfortune was not common, but it *did* happen. In terms of both safety and travel time, nothing beat teleportation.

The *Glafir’s Leaf* being repaired was important to Capua as well. Until the repairs were completed, Freya and her retinue would be unable to return to their home country, and that would in turn stagnate the official diplomatic ties between the two nations. Ordinarily, using teleportation would require a substantial payment, but there were cases like this where it was convenient for the royal family as well, where no payment was required. Of course, that was predicated on their acceptance of traveling in this way.

Zenjirou was clearly relieved by her answer.

“Great. She doesn’t seem in too big a hurry, but personally, I think it’s better to solve it quickly. There’s always a risk that when the management and client

are away and the work's running behind, they'll get impatient and cut corners."

Zenjirou's concern was that the workers would rush and force themselves to meet the original estimates no matter what it took. Freya and Aura were both royalty by birth, so they could not quite understand just how seriously orders from superiors could be taken.

The workers could sometimes push themselves more than they should in order to fulfill the requirements set by their superiors and clients. The concern was that although working on the repairs during the rain was dangerous, it was not *impossible*.

Hearing his concerns, the queen's face grew more serious. "I see. I do seem to recall similar things happening among my subordinates on the way. If a lack of communication on our part sees casualties or even fatalities, then it will certainly add to tension in further negotiations."

While international relations were built on power and benefit, negotiations themselves were carried out by humans with emotions. A kind person, if their negotiation partner's orders resulted in death or wounds, would most certainly be less disposed towards further negotiation.

"Very well. I shall summon both Princess Freya and the warrior Victoria tomorrow. Doing so will require a warning, so I will not be able to send them on their way tomorrow, but they will likely be gone by the day after."

"Yeah, I think that works. Thanks, Aura." Zenjirou slumped in relief at her quick decision.

"I should be the one thanking you," she replied. "Forming diplomatic relations with Uppasala is a matter of state interest, and I am responsible for the state here. Incidentally, I have only just thought of it, but what would you say to sending your knight, Natalio, or perhaps Ines to provide the warning?"

It was a question he had not expected, but he could understand what she was implying after some brief thought. Those two were always with him if he went a great distance. In some respects, they were his aides.

"You mean for me to join them later?"

She nodded in answer.

“Indeed. It seems a good opportunity since you have learned the spell. Rather than testing yourself by coming from a foreign country, I had the idea that you could return from a place you have already been—Valentia. If you succeed, you can go back to Valentia the next day under your own power. If that is possible, then once Princess Freya has finished her business, you can send her and her warrior back here. Naturally, you would send either Natalio or Ines to herald their arrival first.”

“Oh, right. If I can use teleportation, we can start doing that kind of thing.”

Zenjirou finally felt the excitement of her suggestion, looking down at his hands. Teleportation was on a different level than the barrier and attraction spells he had learned thus far. If he could master it, it would quite literally broaden his horizons.

Zenjirou was not someone who placed a lot of value on himself, but if he could make it that far, he had no choice but to accept it. He would have the power to greatly change the course of politics within the country.

Aura smiled gently at her husband’s belated realization of the power he would wield. “That is the true worth of teleportation. Multiple casters show their real value in domestic and foreign deployments, making day trips, albeit of limited numbers, possible. Ideally, I would have someone stationed in Fort Montjuïc in the east, Port Valentia in the west, the silver mines in Potosi in the south, and in the old capital to the north in Duch Lara’s lands.”

Those four locations had been used for exactly that before the war when the family still had multiple magic users. However, Zenjirou frowned.

“Hmm, that might be a royal’s duty, but I’d rather not. Even in the future, I’d prefer not to be away from the capital for long periods, and I’d rather not send my kids out like that either.”

There would be no other future wielders of space-time magic other than Zenjirou’s children. He complained despite understanding that, but Aura spoke consolingly.

“I would rather not admit it, but you need not worry about that. Distributing royals in such a way would only happen after there were plenty within the capital. The vast majority of requests for teleportation come from here in the

capital. I as the queen, you as my spouse, Carlos as our heir, and at least a second child if the worst should happen, all need to be here before anyone would be sent to stay elsewhere.”

“Oh, right,” he answered with a look of relief.

Aura couldn’t help but feel guilty at his reaction. At present, it was all but certain that Freya would be Zenjirou’s concubine. If that happened, she would be given a duchy in the country, with some small territory on the coast. Any children that they had would inherit the title and land, and they would live not in the capital, but in the duchy.

It was essentially already decided that Zenjirou *would* have to live apart from his children. His children with Princess Freya, to be precise. To Aura, they would be nothing more than second-generation royals who required some care in their treatment, but they would be Zenjirou’s own flesh and blood.

“Well, considering such a distant future will be no help to us now,” she said with a smile, her hand coming to rest unconsciously on her stomach, which held their second child.



The next day, Aura met with Freya in a room of the palace. Having been informed of the circumstances, the princess’s ice-blue eyes widened slightly in surprise.

“Then you will be sending Skaji and me to Valentia via teleportation, Your Majesty?” she asked.

“I will. It was my husband’s suggestion, but having heard his reasoning, I, too, believe it to be the best option. There are unpredictable hindrances that the rainy season can cause when traveling. Zenjirou also indicated that the workers may not be aware of how important following the schedule is. If they see it as more serious than it actually is, they may force themselves to work through the rain, and I am far more aware of the dangers that such a decision can invite than you, Princess Freya.”

“You are quite right,” the silver-haired princess answered, thinking over the red-haired queen’s explanation. She understood that Aura’s claims were

correct, but the reason she could not reply immediately was due to the risk it would expose her to.

Freya found it difficult to say that she fully understood Aura's personality, or the teleportation spell itself. If Aura were to claim she was sending the princess to Valentia but instead teleported her to somewhere high in the sky or into a volcano, or even just somewhere completely unknown to her, it would mean instant death.

Of course, she was also certain that the concubinage agreement and intercontinental trade represented big wins to Capua as well. She could not claim to fully understand the queen, but she knew that the woman was a logical and sensible politician, at least.

She also knew that the royal family offered teleportation to other people for a fee. To put it somewhat crudely, while teleportation was a big advantage to the royal family, it was also a significant source of income. Using it as a murder weapon would curtail that income. No one would voluntarily accept something that put them at the caster's mercy like that.

With all of this information put together, Freya was almost certain that Aura would not send her anywhere dangerous. Once she had made that determination, she responded quickly.

"Very well, then I would be honored to accept your offer. What would be an acceptable payment?"

The blonde behind her gasped slightly at the immediate answer from her silver-haired princess. After all, the princess traveling in that way meant that the warrior would be doing the same, so it was not surprising that it would shock her.

However, Skaji had sworn her life to Freya, so she would not refute her liege's decision. As she marshaled her expression, the queen spoke.

"This concerns the repair of the *Glasis's Leaf*, which is by no means insignificant to Capua either. The instruction in the more advanced shipbuilding and smithing techniques from the Northern Continent makes asking for repayment for this inappropriate."

“My, I have no words to express my thanks for your magnanimity,” Freya answered with a rueful smile in her mind.

Aura’s answer that she wanted no payment was, naturally, not what it seemed on the surface. It was a statement that she did not want money for it, yes, but also a reminder to Freya to bring back shipwrights and smiths when she came to marry. With Freya’s affection for Zenjirou, it was to her benefit as well.

“Then the sooner a decision is made, the better. When are Skaji and I to leave for Valentia, Your Majesty?”

“If it is convenient for you, I can send you as soon as tomorrow,” Aura answered.

Now Freya’s eyes slid to her confidante. “Skaji, I think that would be best, but what is your response?”

The carer and guard answered her liege instantly. “That is no problem. We will gather the necessary luggage today.”

The queen offered a brief warning to the accomplished warrior: “Ah, Lady Victoria, teleportation can only transport what you can personally carry, so pack with that in mind.”

“I understand. My thanks for the warning, Your Majesty,” the tall warrior replied with a bow.



The next day, Princess Freya and her guard, Victoria Kronkvist—or Skaji—were standing within the port city of Valentia as rain lashed down over it.

Ines, a maid of the inner palace had been sent the day before to announce them, so when the pair arrived, the preparations had already been made to welcome them at the ducal estate.

When Freya had left for the capital, she had taken half the soldiers who had been on board the *Glasisr’s Leaf*. The remainder had stayed in Valentia to protect the sailors with less combat capability.

After meeting the remnants of her forces and quickly completing the formalities with the governor, Damian, Freya quickly headed to the rain-

drenched port.

With Capua having a full rainy season, they also had suitable rain gear. The silver and golden-haired princess and vassal were wearing hooded raincoat-like affairs over their clothes, made from the skin of aquatic reptiles, which shielded them as they made their way straight along the paved road and its periodic puddles.

Freya's experience with camping and boating back in her homeland meant that a little splashing water was not enough to deter her. As the ashen gray seas entered her sight along with the skies of the same color, Freya shook her head lightly, shedding the water that had accumulated on the hood.

She let out a soft sigh as she murmured, "After experiencing it for myself like this, I am forced to understand how the Southern Continent can see lineal magic as such an absolute."

"It certainly is ridiculous in some ways," her guard agreed in a similar tone. "Limited in scope as it may be, spells like that could completely overturn combat doctrine as we know it."

Freya's homeland had no lineal magic within its royal family. Instead, the country had largely dedicated itself to the advancement of technology. That tendency meant that the general view of the populace was that technology outstripped magic on the whole. Experiencing the practicality of Capua's lineal magic, however, shook that perspective.

In this instance, while there were very few people capable of utilizing the spell, it enabled trips that would take *days* by carriage to occur in mere moments. From the perspective of the Northern Continent, it was practically breaking the rules.

"How wonderful. I want it," Freya murmured. It was far from the first time she'd let her desires slip as they walked, and Skaji offered her liege a quiet warning as they continued.

"Princess, lineal magic theft is an act that can all too easily lead to a declaration of war on this continent."

Zenjirou had been placed under such pressure even though he personally was

not at fault and only had a latent spark of another land's magic, after all. It was impossible to say just how strongly people would push back against someone *intentionally* aiming to take lineal magic for themselves.

"A pity," Freya murmured regretfully after a moment. Then, her mood shifted instantly as she directed a complaint at her guard along with a bright smile. "Incidentally, Skaji, this *is* the harbor. Perhaps you cannot see my clothes thanks to the rainwear?"

As she spoke, Freya pointed at the men's clothes she was wearing under the raincoat.

The taller woman realized what her princess was implying. "My apologies, captain," Skaji answered with a quirk of her lips.

The harbor was relatively close to the estate, so it had not taken them long to arrive. They were soon standing in front of the wharf that the *Glafir's Leaf* was moored to.

The rain was still lashing down, but the lack of wind—and the threefold breakwater arrangement protecting the port itself—meant that the water was calm. Even so, carrying out repairs in such torrential rain was by no means a safe proposition.

Freya looked up at the ship for the first time in several months and murmured, "His Majesty most certainly has keen insight."

"Indeed," Skaji agreed. "At the very least, he sees things that we do not."

The ship in front of them clearly showed signs that they were pushing on with repairs even through the heavy rain. One such sign was the sight of someone having climbed the mainmast with a hammer. The burly figure was swinging away even now.

Freya let out a mixed sigh of self-recrimination and annoyance before giving her aide an order. "Skaji, if you would."

"Understood," the woman replied before filling her lungs with air. Then, she called in a voice easily audible over the driving rain. "Attention! There has been a schedule change! Those working are to lay down their tools and assemble here!"



Zenjirou's own arrival in Valentia came several days later. Once the required greetings with the governor were observed, his first destination was his room in the ducal estate. He had his camera with him and took images of the room.

Zenjirou had only just achieved any proficiency with the teleportation spell and could not yet use it without looking at the image on his camera. Even if he used the camera, his success rate was around twenty percent, but that could be overcome with multiple attempts.

"If I photograph places like this, it should make it so I have more destinations to teleport to," he said to himself.

The unnerving part of this method was that if the batteries ran out or the camera broke at his destination, he would be unable to return. To guard against that, he'd used some of the little printer ink he had remaining to print a photo of the stone room of the palace. That was the most important destination, so he could work with it. Even that, though, was not a permanent solution. He would need to eventually train himself so that he could do the same as Aura and teleport to anywhere he had visited.

At any rate, that was his goal for the future, but it was important to get any ability to cast the spell for now. Despite his reliance on the crutch that the camera represented, Zenjirou was a valuable asset. As of now, he had to throw himself into the fray along with his crutch.

For the moment, once Zenjirou had finished his breather, he would have to meet Freya with his own guard, Natalio, and Ines. When he did, Freya was not wearing the now-familiar dress, but the captain's outfit he had first seen her in, perhaps due to being somewhere close to her ship. Zenjirou's personal opinion was that men's clothes like this actually suited her even better than the dress she normally wore. Not because she was manly, but because wearing clothes suited for active pursuits and energetic movements seemed more natural for her.

The princess's first words when Zenjirou bade her sit on the sofa opposite him were of thanks. "I offer my deepest thanks for your efforts to our benefit on this occasion," she said. "Due to your aid, we were able to put precautions in place

before there was a serious incident. Once more, I offer what thanks I can.”

As Freya spoke, the warrior standing behind her—Skaji, of course—put a fist to her shoulder and bowed her head.

The precise wording of the thanks let Zenjirou infer that asking Aura to teleport them here was not the only reason for her response. He kept his tone as soft and even as possible as he made sure of his conclusions.

“I presume they are pushing on with the repairs, then?”

Freya nodded, sending her short silver hair swaying. “They are indeed. I am in awe of your insight.”

The statement didn’t seem to be entirely flattery, so Zenjirou smiled awkwardly. “Not at all. My concerns simply happened to be correct. It is not worth such admiration.”

“Yet it was a failure on my part. I have spent a long time voyaging with the sailors of the *Glasisir’s Leaf*, and yet I remained unaware of the disparity of our expectations until you identified it. Frankly, I am ashamed of that.”

“My apologies,” Zenjirou replied. “But have you ever been separated from the sailors for such a long time? When you and your subordinates are in close proximity, orders can be adjusted as things develop. When you are separated, as you have been, that is not possible. Inevitably, loyal subordinates will try to fulfill their initial orders.” With his insight into her personality, Zenjirou felt that a logical explanation of *why* things may have developed in this way would be more appreciated than simple consolation.

“I see. In their position, I can understand that happening. I will gladly accept your wisdom here.”

The genuine admiration made Zenjirou shift awkwardly in his seat. His wondering whether the craftsmen might be working through the rain was not because he was more intelligent than either Aura or Freya. It was simply a matter of being in their position before when he worked on Earth.

It was like a client had said that they wanted “such and such ready for such and such date” and been given the okay only for shipping troubles to delay the necessary materials for more than a month. That meant they would have a

month less to accomplish the work, and so the workers would literally work themselves to the bone to meet the original deadline only to be told that the client had expected a delay because of the shipping issues. The client would have been fine with waiting another month, and they got only thanks for their troubles forcing themselves to get it done quicker.

“Then why didn’t you say that to start with?!” was a yell that had always been on Zenjirou’s tongue on such occasions but was not something he could actually say. As a subordinate or subcontractor, the weak position you were in made it very difficult to say, “We can’t do this after all, please give us an extension” after the agreement was signed. If you disappointed your client, they might just give the job to someone else, and you’d have lost everything. A lot of people would therefore choose to force themselves to meet the deadline if it were at all possible.

If it still wasn’t doable no matter what you did, it also let you keep the extension to an absolute minimum, so people would still work as hard as they could. Zenjirou’s personal experience in this area meant that he could easily imagine how much the shipwrights would shy away from admitting that it would be difficult to finish on time. They would need to report that to both the monarch of the country hosting them *and* their superior with whom they’d agreed on the work.

“I assume you have revised the work schedule, then?” Zenjirou asked.

Freya gave a slight nod, but with a concerned expression. “We have. We were able to calculate how much the rainy season would delay things, approximately. Adjustments to mitigate that have been put in place, but I am slightly concerned about the blazing season that comes next. It may once again delay things. It will be three months of consecutive heat similar to the time of year we arrived, will it not?”

Zenjirou’s own face took on a conflicted look as he remained silent, but he decided it was best to explain it truthfully. “Your Highness, the time you have spent here has mostly fallen within the active season, according to the calendar. Well, the weather will not change so drastically in a single day, so the latter half will be similar. However, the hottest month is far hotter than that time of year,” he explained.

“Huh...” Freya had been caught off guard for once. There had been a long pause, and then all she could manage was that gasp along with a blank look.

When Zenjirou glanced at the other woman in the room, she too seemed disbelieving. Her brown eyes were wide. Zenjirou could definitely empathize. If he’d not brought his ice fan along, he would have been sure he was about to die.

Freya and her shipmates were all from the far north. They had even less experience with the heat. Zenjirou had lived in Kanto, so he’d experienced highs of over thirty-five degrees during the day in the summer, and over thirty degrees at night. Simply explaining it might not be enough, but he had to warn them.

“The hottest days in the blazing season can see the air being hotter than the body. Some days can see the nights just as hot. The Capuans were born and bred in that climate, and even they are at risk of death during such heat. Most physical work during this period is done in the early morning and late evening when the heat is relatively tame. At noon, everyone—nobility and commoner alike—sleeps to keep energy levels up,” he explained.

There was a long silence from the two guests. It must have been the first time they’d heard any of the specifics because both of the Uppasalans were utterly lost for words.

“Some of our workers are assisting with the repairs, I believe. Have they not mentioned this before?” Zenjirou asked.

Freya let out a regretful sigh at his question. “I have not spoken with them directly, but I have heard there was some doubt with regard to the schedule on-site. However, I made the assumption that it was a technical matter, due to this being the first time they have worked on a ship of the *Glasisir’s Leaf’s* scale. I did not question it further.”

“Ah, that is understandable,” Zenjirou answered.

It was a common occurrence when there was communication across different cultural backgrounds.

The sailors from the *Glasisir’s Leaf* had no concept of the blazing season on the

Southern Continent. They could not imagine a season so hot that it was unsafe to work during the day. On the other hand, the Capuan craftsmen had never left this region, so they could not imagine anyone who was not aware of the blazing season.

All combined, even if the schedule was questioned, the Uppasalans would see no issue, and the Capuans would simply take their word for it. After all, this *was* the first time the Capuans were working on a four-masted ship. None of them would know the difficulty of—or time investment required for—its repairs. Not only could they not understand each other’s assumptions, but they were also not aware that those assumptions were different to begin with, leading to the disparity.

“Perhaps we should summon the locals and confirm how much work can actually be done in this region during the blazing season?” Freya suggested. “It means our initial plans will change, and I personally would like to remain here until the repairs are completed. Would that be acceptable?”

“I would assume so,” Zenjirou replied. “I will be sending you back to the capital, so the journey will be instantaneous. I will discuss your stay here with the governor, so I assume you may spend as long as you wish here.”

“My apologies for the imposition, Your Majesty,” Freya said, once more offering her gratitude.

Intermission 2 — Lucinda's Influence

While Zenjirou was in Valentia checking on the repairs with Freya, Aura received a request for a meeting with General Pujol.

Generals and ministers did have the right to unlimited audiences with the queen, but very few of them ever exercised it. It went without saying that those with such titles were all high nobility and—for better or worse—had their own positions and obligations weighing them down. If they did too much on their own, they could easily gain a reputation for being flighty or unable to act in accordance with their station.

In some respects, not paying heed to the eyes on him and public opinion was perhaps very much like the general.

"I had thought he might calm somewhat after his marriage, but it seems he is the same as ever," Aura commented with a sigh.

The narrow-faced secretary at her side showed no feeling either on his face or in his voice as he replied, "General Pujol calming down is perhaps just as likely as Your Majesty acting in a ladylike fashion."

"Oh, so you think it *is* possible?" she asked with a sarcastic smile.

The secretary's slender eyebrow rose. "Oh? That almost sounds as if you wish to say that you have become ladylike, Your Majesty?"

"I am saying exactly that. Do you know how ladylike and womanly I can become when just my husband and I are alone?"

"Never have I been so grateful that I am not permitted entrance to the inner palace."

"Just what is that intended to mean?"

"Forgive me for not explaining further. I have no wish to be imprisoned for speaking against the crown."

"If you truly speak against the crown, it will take more than just your head to

satisfy me.”

Their usual banter was interrupted by a knock at the door, followed by a man’s voice. “Excuse me. General Pujol is here to see you. May I show him through?”

The queen answered her guard in a carrying voice. “You may.”

The door clicked open.

“Excuse me.”

The man who walked in—General Pujol Guillén—had a body honed to the extreme, and said body was covered by the Capuan military uniform.

“I am pleased to see you. Take a seat,” Aura told him.

“My thanks,” answered the general, calmly walking into the room and seating himself on the sofa opposite her.

The sofa was built to accommodate people of normal stature and most certainly was not suited to the general’s large frame. Even so, he did not look out of place. His strength allowed him to hold his whole body in an appropriate position.

The queen took a sip from the tea a maid had brought before dispensing with the pleasantries and bluntly questioning the man. “So, what business do you have?”

It was somewhat out of the norm for a conversation between royalty and nobility, but this was the best way of interacting with the general. The man preferred not wasting time and being upfront rather than following the normal etiquette in these situations.

Indeed, the man showed no displeasure at the queen’s question and simply answered, “First, I wish to offer my congratulations.”

“Hmm? I am sure I already recall you doing so for my pregnancy?” Despite thinking it pointless, the queen feigned ignorance. Still, the general immediately moved on.

“I did. This is not congratulations on your pregnancy, but for Sir Zenjirou’s achievement with teleportation.”



Expecting exactly that, the queen gave a mental tut. Her husband had only succeeded a few days ago. It had not been officially announced as yet either.

With that said, there had been several eyewitnesses when he had managed it. The knights and maids working in the royal palace were chief among them. There had been no real attempt to maintain their silence.

It was therefore no surprise that nobles with their ears to the ground would already know about it. However, the general was the only person who would request an audience in the intervening time between the fact spreading and officially being announced to “offer his congratulations.”

The queen gave a very deliberate sigh as she fixed the giant before her with a glare. “You are sharp-eared indeed. It would have been announced once matters had settled.”

The weight that teleportation commanded among the various spells of space-time magic of the Capuan family’s lineal magic was exceedingly high. The spell was one of the reasons Capua reigned supreme in the region. A single extra caster was a valued asset to the kingdom as it currently was. For a fee, the Capuan family could cast teleportation for foreign and domestic nobles as well.

The war, however, had resulted in the only caster left being on the throne, which meant that such opportunities had been limited. But now the prince consort could cast the spell as well. He also had a much less constrained position, and richer nobles would be looking to earn his favor.

“My husband is currently in Valentia. He is likely to return in the next few days, but he still has a limited number of locations he can use teleportation to reach,” she explained.

Thinking that the general had asked for this audience to offer his congratulations in order to get first dibs on Zenjirou’s teleportation, the queen kept her glare on him to forestall any such thoughts. However, the general showed no real discomfort at that, even agreeing with her.

“I am aware. Sir Zenjirou should be prioritizing teleportation for his own use. I believe he mentioned wishing to head to the Twin Kingdoms as soon as possible after learning the spell?”

“Indeed, he does,” Aura affirmed. Zenjirou had repeatedly said so in public, so there was no need to try to hide it now.

“His burning desire to do so is for no other reason than his concern for you. After all, being able to go to the Twin Kingdoms via teleportation makes it possible to summon a healer from the Gilbelles should the situation call for it.”

“Indeed...that is correct,” she agreed again, slower this time. This was also public knowledge, so she had no reason to dispute it, but hearing of her husband’s adoration from other people was slightly discomfiting.

“His concerns have held true, and you are once again pregnant, so my humble opinion is that Sir Zenjirou will desire to head for the Twin Kingdoms as quickly as possible.”

“Emotionally, I would quite agree, but that is based on flawed assumptions. Whatever the case may be, it is currently the rainy season, and the blazing season will follow. Any journey to the Twin Kingdoms will be after those, in the active season,” Aura replied with a slight shrug.

She would be sending Zenjirou herself, so his travel was not tied to the seasons, but his guards and maids were another matter. The spell lacked sufficient scope to send each and every one of them by way of teleportation, so they would have to travel by road. It was therefore impossible to truly divorce the trip from the seasons.

Roads would become rivers in the heavy rain, and getting quite literally bogged down in the rain meant that travel was out of the question during that season. The blazing season came with a national recommendation to sleep during the day, so it would be fairly difficult then as well.

Familiar locales such as domestic trips were one thing, but trips to other countries—especially a nation half a continent away, which was foreign in even a cultural sense—were best carried out during the active season.

The general should have been well aware of that, but he still leaned forward and disputed her statement. “Yet, you are already pregnant. Will Sir Zenjirou be able to wait until then, emotionally speaking?”

If things went according to Doctor Michel’s predictions, their second child

would be born right in the middle of the active season. The season constituted an equivalent of fall and winter in Japan, which made half the year fall under that category.

Assuming things started just as the active season began, there would be three months before the birth, but life did not necessarily follow expectations. Any prediction was, in the end, nothing but a prediction, not a definite date. There was a possibility of the birth being premature. The delivery itself also wasn't the only risk. It was certainly the most dangerous time, but there was a distinct possibility that her condition could take a sudden turn for the worse at any moment during the pregnancy. In that respect, the general's claims that Zenjirou would want to go "as soon as possible" were completely accurate.

Understanding that, she moved to listen more seriously. "Then what would you suggest?"

"Thank you. I cannot deny that traveling in the rainy season would be a suicidal act. However, once the season has ended, a carefully selected number of trained soldiers could make the journey at the beginning of the next," he said.

"Hmm, the beginning of the blazing season," the queen mused rather than dismissing it out of hand.

While the blazing season covered three months of time, those three months were not necessarily equally hot. The hottest month was the middle one. The months before and after were easier to deal with.

Of course, "hot" was a relative term, in that it was easier to spend a month where the temperature went over thirty-five, but not over forty, compared to a month where it did.

After considering that, the queen shook her head. "No. I admit that there is a decent chance of success, but the risk is still too large to ignore. The path there is not known territory. It is not simply a matter of distance. I doubt you are unaware of this, are you?"

Aura's statement was correct. Traveling a path that you knew was a vastly different endeavor than traveling one you did not. The drakes of this world were far better for transport than horses and donkeys, and they had the trump

card that magic represented. This meant the Capuans were in a far better position than Earth when society had developed to the same extent, but long-distance travel still had its pitfalls.

How far was the next village? Where could you get water? If you didn't have sufficient information, it made traveling a perilous endeavor. The blazing season meant that you would need to take breaks during the day, so progress would be slower. The higher temperature meant that more water was needed as well. Knowledge of feeding grounds and watering holes for the drakes was similarly indispensable. Even magic could only make up for so much.

The general agreed with each of her points but then offered a proposal. "It would be somewhat risky were we alone, yes. However, guides that know the route well would ameliorate much of the danger. I would therefore like to propose that we take half of the troops that came with Prince Francesco and Princess Bona to allow them to rotate their members."

"What?" She had not expected such a suggestion in the slightest.

The general continued his explanation to the now wider-eyed queen. "When the blazing season arrives, Their Highnesses will have been in Capua for approximately a year. Their guards will be longing for home. If we furnish them with the cost for rotating their troops, I wager they will agree to guide us. The route between our two countries has most recently been followed by them, albeit in reverse. With their guidance, even the blazing season should pose very little problem, in my humble opinion."

"Hmmm..."

The suggestion was unexpected, yet realistic, so Aura once more fell into thought. Having a group that had already followed the path would indeed mitigate most of the issues as much as could be done. Thinking back, the two royals had arrived just before the active season, so barely within the blazing season. You could use them as proof that travel between the two countries was possible at that time.

The general's other claims were also most likely true. Spending close to a year in another culture would often make people—though the extent would vary—homesick. A troop rotation would, in all probability, be wholeheartedly

accepted by the soldiers, at least. If Capua took on the financial burden, their superiors were unlikely to object. It would also be akin to paying for the safety of Capua's own men, so it would be an acceptable expenditure.

Her view of the plan's prospects had done a complete one-eighty, and Aura leaned forward in her seat to question the general further. "I understand your thoughts, and they seem realistic. However, it leads to another problem. The representative of Their Highness's forces is a highly ranked knight in his own right. If we do not have someone of at least equal rank, the position of leadership will be completely with them." Aura said this while knowing how it would be answered as soon as the first word left her mouth.

"That is, of course, a concern. Therefore, if you would permit it, I would gratefully take on the role myself."

The answer was exactly as she had imagined. If he was in charge of the guard force, it would enable him to be close to Zenjirou for the Prince Consort's entire stay in the other country. It was an unmissable opportunity for anyone who wanted to curry favor with—or win over—Zenjirou.

She let out an exaggerated sigh. "You are a core part of our forces. Would you not consider delegating such roles?"

It was a suggestion she had made on several occasions. He accepted her words and then answered after a period of apparent thought.

"A reasonable view," he said. "In which case, there is a young commander in the Drake Marksmen Knights who is promising. I will delegate all practical work on this occasion to him and be but a figurehead unless the situation calls for it," he suggested before giving a laugh. "Training up my subordinates is important, after all." He was essentially saying that he would be doing so, but this time, he would be present as well.

"I cannot countenance you being abroad for an indefinite amount of time like that," Aura said exasperatedly, not having the faintest idea what he would next suggest.

"I am aware of that. Therefore, I was considering asking Sir Zenjirou to send me back to the capital after he arrives."

“What?” Aura asked after a long pause. She hadn’t intended to, but she had shown just how much the man—who could easily be considered a political opponent—had shocked her. It was hardly a surprise, though, considering how unexpected his suggestion was.

The queen fell silent for a while before speaking to verify that she had the facts in order.

“So, what is your suggestion? That you head to the Twin Kingdoms as the head of our force. Then, when my husband arrives, you plan to delegate everything to this young commander of yours and return via my husband’s teleportation magic?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. However, I will return once I have seen that the guard is being run correctly, so I will not return immediately after Sir Zenjirou’s arrival.”

Everything he had said was completely logical. It was precisely due to that logic that Aura felt wary. Each point in his sequence of suggestions was beneficial to Aura and Zenjirou, but less so to the general himself.

Naturally, it would be a significant achievement to safely see the guard force to the Twin Kingdoms, so it was not *entirely* without benefit to him. However, it felt unnatural that he would actively say he would return to the capital alone, what with his usual tendency of absolutely maximizing the benefit to himself.

Aura would not be there, and Zenjirou would be on his own, while the general’s role would be the head of his guard force. It was the optimum opportunity to make all sorts of insinuations and requests of the prince consort. From his behavior until now, General Pujol would definitely do so as well. And yet, he had said that he would return soon after Zenjirou’s arrival.

“Such a suggestion is unlike you,” Aura commented after further consideration yielded no explanation. Instead, she bluntly spoke her thoughts. “Have you had a change of heart?”

The general grinned broadly at that. “While it has taken a while to sink in, your own statement that I am part of the core of our military has become clear to me. I have decided that to best serve officially in such a position, these duties are the most appropriate course.”

Aura made a tiny noise. She knew what he was aiming for now. She had more questions as a result, but identifying his goal was a stroke of fortune. “I see. I appreciate your forethought with this. I have heard your requests in full and note a significant benefit to them. We will investigate with a view to implementing them. You may leave,” she told him.

The man stood his enormous frame up from the seat. “Excuse me, then, Your Majesty,”

His expression remained in a bold grin until he had left the room. Once he had done so, Aura was left in the room with only her confidante, Fabio.

She relaxed slightly into the sofa and gave a deep sigh. Then, she spoke shortly to the man. “Your thoughts?”

“Are likely in much the same direction as your own,” he answered, as emotionless as ever.

“He wants the marshal’s position.”

“In all probability.”

There was no other way of taking the general’s final statement that he would be working *officially* as a core of the military. Pujol Guillén’s desire for the position of marshal—the top position in the Capuan military—was well-known. He didn’t exactly hide it.

The request itself was therefore not unusual in the slightest. The issue was the time that he had chosen to make it and *how* he had made it.

Aura’s second pregnancy had made her understand that things could not continue with the system as it currently was. The pregnancy and birth limited her actions as queen significantly, slowing the political climate of the country. That was why she had decided to appoint a marshal and prime minister, despite knowing that it would decrease her own influence.

Things on that front were currently in the preliminary stages, and the general had arrived to try and get her to appoint *him* to that position. She could only assume that he had gotten access to the information that she was making those preparations.

A crease formed between her eyebrows as she frowned unhappily. “Frankly, I find it difficult to believe that Pujol would have the information at this stage of the process,” she said.

“I quite agree, but that does not change the fact of the matter. We should consider just how the good general could have acquired such knowledge.”

The queen nodded in agreement. The information was being kept as quiet as possible, but the preliminary documents and materials for the ceremonies to announce those positions, and the reservations for the locations, needed to be dealt with through the civil officials. Naturally, there was a gag order, but the officials were not able to completely hide their actions from other people.

Even so, it would be hard to directly link what they were doing to a certainty that “Her Majesty is appointing a marshal.” Collecting and parsing the countless rumors from the royal palace before investigating them and reaching a conclusion would require a significant degree of talent.

General Pujol did not have those talents. Aura’s long association with the man let her make that declaration with certainty.

“The entire conversation was strange from beginning to end,” she continued. “If Pujol knew that I was appointing a marshal, he would normally bring it up in the bluntest of manners. That is the kind of man he is.”

“Indeed. General Pujol’s usual negotiation tactics are to demand as much as he can before gradually allowing concessions.”

The queen nodded. “Yet this time, he did not. Instead, he made a suggestion that benefits us greatly—a method to get our troops to the Twin Kingdoms during the blazing season—dispelled my concerns by suggesting his own return, and finally intimated that he wants the position of marshal.”

She gave a groan in the back of her throat. His suggestions were in a much more acceptable format, a far cry from his usual “Gimme, gimme, gimme everything I want.” In a word, it was unsettling.

“Pujol Guillén’s information-gathering ability has increased. What do you think the reason for this is?” asked the queen.

“It is unlikely that his own abilities have suddenly improved. Instead, I would

presume he has an ally with those abilities now.”

The queen continued, “And Pujol Guillén’s negotiation skills have increased. What do you think the reason for that is?”

“Perhaps he made preparations ahead of time. I find it unlikely that he would do so himself due to his personality, so I presume someone gave him a plan to follow.”

The queen continued once again, “Pujol Guillén did not once utter the word ‘marshal.’ He was more polite than I ever imagined him being. What do you think is the reason for that?”

“The general is an extremely ambitious person, but he is no fool. If someone were to logically explain to him that negotiating in such a manner was more likely to see his ambitions realized, he would be able to understand the explanation and put it into practice. I presume there is someone capable of providing such explanations in his vicinity.”

There was silence. Rather than asking for information she didn’t know, Aura’s questioning was more to make sure they were on the same page. However hard it was to believe, a monarch could not refute the truth when it was staring them in the face.

Aura asked one final question. “This person with information-gathering skills, the person who advised him on negotiation, and who has directed the general’s ambition... Do you think it is plausible that there is, in fact, only one person?”

“I would suggest it is more likely that he has obtained one major piece than coincidentally gaining three smaller pawns in such a short space of time.”

Fabio’s explanation was all too likely. Aside from anything else, there was only one person who had recently been around Pujol Guillén of late.

The queen considered his answer for a while before issuing an order. “Gather all the information we have on Pujol Guillén’s wife, Lucinda Guillén, Both with regard to her abilities and temperament.”

“Very well,” her secretary answered with a polite bow.

Chapter 4 — Freya Uppasala — 2

The season after the rainy season was the blazing season. Of course, while the seasons were precisely delineated on the calendar, the weather would not necessarily instantly follow suit.

Capua used a lunisolar calendar, which meant that intercalary months were added once every few years, so the seasons could change by up to a month. Even disregarding that, there were years where the rainy season ran longer and those where it ran shorter. All this resulted in there being years where the calendar said it was still the rainy season, but it did not rain at all. Conversely, there were years when the blazing season had officially long since begun but the rains had yet to abate.

However, the locals had mastered the abilities to deal with that. The color of the sky and how the flowers developed let people see when the season was coming to an end for practical purposes rather than just in terms of the calendar.

It was on one of these days, when the blazing season had started in earnest, that Zenjirou's guard force—headed by Pujol Guillén—lined up in the audience chamber. They were there to see to the formalities before their departure for the Twin Kingdoms.

"Queen Aura, Sir Zenjirou, we are ready," said the general, standing before the dais as the group's representative.

Zenjirou's usual practice for events he attended with Aura was to play the part of a silent figurehead. However, that was not possible today. After all, the ceremony was specifically for his guard force for the trip he would be taking to the Twin Kingdoms. In a certain light, it put Zenjirou right at center stage.

He remained seated on his throne as he raised a hand carelessly towards them. "I am grateful that so many excellent warriors would put their effort forward for me. However, I wish for each of you to remember that you are the jewels of our land. While it may be boorish of me to say this to you all

considering your unyielding spirit, I will still make it an order. Understand that your lives are to be your highest priority. I have no desire for a strict itinerary to be adhered to such that it could cost your lives. I wish for nothing more than to be able to see you all once more when I personally arrive in the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle.”

“You honor us with your words, sir!” the general answered for his men, prompting every soldier there to put their right fists to the opposite breast and bow their heads.

Despite knowing that it was part of the ceremony, the thud of the various burly soldiers and knights simultaneously saluting him made Zenjirou jump slightly. He did his best to keep it from his face and demeanor, but the warriors had keen insight and may have noticed regardless.

That said, it was a little late to be worrying about such things. Zenjirou had publicly declared that he was no fighter and that his combat potential and courage were both on the level of women and children. This fit that established image.

He continued, speaking to the blond prince and chestnut-haired princess standing to the side. “Prince Francesco, Princess Bona. I wish to take this opportunity to once again thank you both for allowing us the use of your precious soldiers as guides.”

Francesco was the first to reply. “Not at all. It was a welcome proposition to us as well. Some of our men were starting to long for a return after spending so long in a foreign land. Just between the two of us, some of the younger men have been crying for home,” he said with a laugh.

“Prince Francesco!” hissed Bona from his side as she tugged on his sleeve. She was too late, though.

Some of the younger soldiers from the Twin Kingdoms had red cheeks and shook to the extent that Zenjirou felt sorry for them. Fortunately, there seemed to be a certain level of sympathy between everyone here, so no one remarked upon it. However, the men in question looked almost unable to take it.

Bona seemed to want to change the awkward mood as quickly as possible. “I wish to offer you thanks,” she said. “I cannot express my gratitude deeply

enough for your generosity in suggesting something which we would ordinarily never have done. I am grateful on behalf of our soldiers who are returning home.”

As ever, Zenjirou felt a smile tug at his lips as she spoke so earnestly and politely. “Not at all, Princess Bona. As I said earlier, we are heartened greatly by the guidance of your soldiers. It is nothing that requires thanks.”

Aura had watched in silence so far, but as Zenjirou finished his own statement in a single breath, she stepped in. “We could talk for as long as we please, but that would delay departure. I trust we are now finished?” she asked.

Prince Consort Zenjirou gave an exaggerated nod of agreement. “Indeed. The cool days of the blazing season are a precious commodity. Men, depart.”

“Yes, sir! We shall be off!”

With Zenjirou’s signal given, the general’s handpicked soldiers gave a cry of acknowledgment in unison with half the forces of the Twin Kingdoms.



Meanwhile, in the port city of Valentia on the western coast, First Princess Freya Uppasala of the country of the same name had her tongue out like a panting dog in the room she had been assigned.

“The days of rain were much more pleasant than this...” she murmured.

She was barefoot, wearing a white skirt that was thin enough to almost be transparent. Even as loungewear, it hardly seemed appropriate for a royal. The silver-haired princess was slumped back against the sofa, almost melting into a puddle.

“Are you well, princess?” asked the tall warrior, Skaji.

Freya didn’t even have the energy to protest being called a princess instead of a captain. “No. It feels like I am stuck inside a steam bath with no respite of chilled water waiting for me. The church’s teachings that the Southern Continent is a punishment have never seemed so apt.”

“Hold yourself together, princess. If His Majesty is to be believed, next month will be even hotter.”

“How... How can people live here? Surely the area is impossible to survive.”

“I understand how you feel, but it was *your* suggestion to marry His Majesty knowing the man lives in this area.”

A tear welled up in Freya’s eyes as she envisioned spending the rest of her life in this environment. She still had her mouth half-open as she lifted a hand to wipe them, then pulled herself up in the seat. Her complexion was ghastly.

“Still, Skaji,” she said with a slight huff of air, “are you not hot?”

The tall warrior answered her liege’s listless question with an even look. “I have trained my body.”

“Training doesn’t lower temperatures, I would have thought.”

There was a pause.

“Such whining is not permitted during my duties.”

“In other words, you’re just enduring it, but you do feel hot, right?” There was no reply. “Right, Skaji?”

Freya’s persistent questioning made even Skaji speak more heatedly. “I do indeed! So kindly cease the comments about the heat. Are you *trying* to depress me as well?!”

The notification of the *Glasiir’s Leaf* being fully repaired arrived on that day of the blazing season. The report was sent immediately via dwarf wyvern to the capital. Once it was received, it would be the moment for Zenjirou to head for Valentia.

The day he was informed, he sent Natalio to Valentia even as Aura sent Ines. Zenjirou would personally arrive the next day via teleportation.

“We have awaited your arrival, Sir Zenjirou,” said the maid upon his arrival.

“The preparations have already been completed,” the knight added.

“Thanks for going ahead with that,” he said appreciatively to both of them.

He had been in the capital until moments ago, and now he was a vast distance away. When Aura had first cast the spell, he had been in awe of her magic. Being capable of the same himself now was an indescribably odd feeling.

“I don’t know whether the world’s just gotten that much bigger or smaller...” he mused almost silently to himself. “This really is strange.”

This was the third time he had been to Valentia, but each trip there or back had been via teleportation, so it didn’t *feel* like it was a distant place.

The Gaziel march, on the other hand, was somewhere he was *painfully* aware of the distance, what with the journey via carriage having made his backside ache. Valentia felt completely different.

When he considered how the various domestic and international locations he could travel to under his own steam would increase, he could somewhat understand the nobles wanting to push concubines on him to get more royals—or more accurately, people who could cast space-time magic. At any rate, traveling via teleportation didn’t use any stamina, so Zenjirou was able to transition straight to business.

“What is Princess Freya doing?”

Ines answered his question, having been in the city since the day before. “Her Highness is already in the waiting room,” she said.

“Then I suppose we can meet right away. Is the parlor ready?”

“It is.”

“Excellent. Lead the way.”

“Very well. Right this way.”

Zenjirou followed the middle-aged maid out into the corridors of the ducal estate. A short time after he entered the meeting room, Freya arrived.

“Your Majesty, thank you for your efforts on our behalf time and again,” she said with a smile. She was wearing the captain’s garb she had worn the first time they had met.

“Not at all. The *Glasis’s Leaf* is far from meaningless to me as well,” he answered, gesturing for her to sit.

“Excuse me,” she said, elegantly taking a seat.

Zenjirou couldn’t help but silently marvel at her. *Despite all this heat, she isn’t*

sweating at all. Does she just cool the area around her?

Her silver hair, icy blue eyes, and pale skin all combined to give her an almost unrealistic air of coolness. The truth was that it was a combination of stubbornness and willpower that was keeping sweat from showing above her neck, but with his lack of knowledge of how things really were, Zenjirou could only be impressed.

“So, according to your report, the *Glafir’s Leaf* is fully repaired?” he asked.

There was a very happy smile on her lips as the princess replied. “Indeed. With your assistance, the work was finished a few days ago. With the harbormaster’s permission, we have already had a shakedown within the harbor. All that remains is the shakedown on the open sea today.”

Valentia had triple-layered sea defenses, so there were practically no waves within the harbor. The *Glafir’s Leaf* was built to travel between the continents, so it could naturally not rely on calm seas. There was therefore a need to ensure there were no problems beyond the sea walls amid the taller waves of the open water.

With that said, the careful repairs and examinations meant that the shakedown on open water was more of a formality than anything.

“I see. Would it be possible for me to accompany you on this final shakedown?” he asked.

Freya nodded joyously. “Please do. I would like nothing more than for you to experience the cutting-edge comfort of Uppasala’s finest ship. Though, with that said, today will only be a short round trip outside of the harbor.”

The *Glafir’s Leaf* was a symbol of pride for Freya. Not only was it an advanced ship made by her homeland, it was the ship she captained, even if her role was largely ceremonial. It was like her very own castle. She loved to boast about her pride and joy.

“Then I shall look forward to it,” Zenjirou replied with a pleasant smile.

Standing on the jetty and looking up at the ship, Zenjirou couldn’t help but speak. “I felt the same way the last time, but seeing the ship from so close is

incredible. It feels more like I am looking at a wall of wood than a ship.”

While Japan certainly had bigger ships, one of this size made of wood was a moving sight. The jetties in the harbor had been constructed for single-masted ships that were much smaller, which meant they were looking up from an even lower position, making the vessel appear even more overwhelming.

“Sir Zenjirou, we are heading up now. Please watch your step,” Natalio warned him.

“Ah, thank you,” Zenjirou replied. He had been staring up, dumbstruck, but Natalio guided him up a wooden gangway connecting the ship and jetty.

The gangway had steps and had been hurriedly constructed for the *Glasir’s Leaf*. You could use a sturdy plank to climb aboard one of Capua’s single-masted ships, but the huge size of the four-masted vessel required a different approach. Sailors could hoist their way up or down a rope ladder, but it was difficult to load or unload cargo like that, which was precisely why they had built the stair-style gangway.

“Whoa, this really isn’t great for your footing,” Zenjirou commented nervously.

“Sir Zenjirou,” Natalio advised, “it is easier if you do not look down.”

“Oh, right.”

It did have a banister despite its simplicity, so Zenjirou was able to climb it surprisingly quickly due to his lack of fear of heights. Preceded by Natalio and followed by Ines, he was soon aboard.

Just after arriving on deck and breathing a sigh of relief, the instability of the flooring made him take an instinctive step back with a gasp.

“Are you okay, Sir Zenjirou?” Ines asked, softly propping him up before he could lose his balance and preventing the worst from happening.

“I am. Thank you, Ines,” he answered awkwardly, quickly stepping away.

They were still in the harbor, so the swell wasn’t too great. He had simply been taken aback at first. Just standing and walking normally wasn’t too difficult with the swaying the ship was currently experiencing.

He was then surrounded by the soldiers of the region who had boarded before him. The *Glafir's Leaf* was, it could be said, a piece of Uppasala floating in Capuan waters. While it was extreme, the ship could certainly suddenly depart for the Northern Continent with Zenjirou aboard, and Capua would have no way of pursuing him if that happened. Of course, he didn't think that Freya would do such a pointless, reckless thing, but discretion was still the better part of valor.

There were probably around ten of the soldiers, by Zenjirou's estimation. Due to being soldiers of Valentia, they didn't have any trouble on the ship. Natalio probably had the least steady gait of the lot. Still, he had been born and raised inland, so it was an unfair comparison, though frankly, he was less sure on his feet than Zenjirou.

While they were positioning themselves, Freya appeared on deck, having also boarded before them. "Welcome aboard the *Glafir's Leaf*, Your Majesty. On behalf of all her sailors, I, Captain Freya, wish to offer you a welcome on our ship. Though the voyage today will be short, I do hope you enjoy it," she said, her shoulders proudly back, somehow managing to make the masculine captain's wear look alluring.



The burly men behind her were likely part of the ship's complement of sailors. There were several even taller than Skaji—who was standing alongside them—making for quite the intimidating sight.

Zenjirou moved his gaze from the sailors back to Freya and did his best to smile as he answered her. "I am quite looking forward to it. As ashamed as I am to admit it, even standing on the deck like this is exhilarating."

He wasn't lying either. This was a wooden sailing vessel, and one that was in active duty for months-long voyages. It was the type of ship he would never have been able to see on Earth, and it was rather exciting. If not for his position as royalty, he probably would have been running about like a kid.

The ship, of course, had no computer guidance. Instead, it relied on manpower and the direction of dozens of sailors to make any headway.

"Princess Freya, can we remain on deck?" he asked eagerly.

Freya's expression switched to one of proper thought. "Let me think. I believe that should be fine. However, please hold on to the handrail, just in case. Perhaps you should sit down to make absolutely certain, but that would at least halve the enjoyment."

"That sounds sensible," Zenjirou answered, a smile appearing on his face at the princess's teasing grin.

This was a quick shakedown and would be a very short trip. It was highly unlikely to be an issue if they remained standing for the full time.

Zenjirou followed her request earnestly, walking over to the handrail and holding it firmly with both hands. With such a sturdy handhold, he should be fine even if there was an unforeseen large swell.

Once he had a firm grip, he had a sudden thought and spoke to the maid waiting behind him. "Ines, you should hold fast as well. People without the training like us will be a bother if we're swaying around."

She seemed more certain of her footing than Natalio, but she and Zenjirou had neither experience on the waves nor training as warriors. Her lips curved slightly at his concern.

“Thank you for your consideration, Sir Zenjirou. I shall take you up on that,” she said, gliding forward to stand next to him and quietly stretching a hand out for the railing.

Natalio watched, slightly envious. He was a reliable knight on dry land but out of his element here on the ship.

Once she was sure that both Zenjirou and Ines had a firm grip on the railing, the captain gave an order in the loudest voice she could muster.

“Glasir’s Leaf, to the waves! Raise anchor!”

About thirty minutes later, the ship had left the harbor and was gliding over the waves.

Just as Freya had said, her title was mostly for show. The only thing she had done as “captain” was give the initial order for their departure. The fine details and everything after that were handled by the rugged man who had been introduced as her vice captain. Every time the vice captain boomed out an order, the sailors moved to adjust the sail or shift the rudder, putting the ship on its proper course.

The wind and waves were both restrained today. Even outside the harbor walls, the deck shifted surprisingly little, although each time the ship changed direction, it listed significantly.

“I am rather impressed that the sailors are working up the masts even with the ship moving so much,” Zenjirou commented.

The closest experience he could relate the feeling to was when a train took a particularly large turn. Holding on to the railing made it a nonissue, but if he had been standing with no handhold at all, it was unstable enough that a fall would be no real surprise.

Despite the listing and rocking, the sailors were rushing across the deck. Freya could likely tell that the praise in his words was genuine. She smiled back at him.

“Indeed. The first thing a sailor learns is how to stand, after all.”

Naturally, that training was not done on a massive ship like the *Glasir’s Leaf*.

Instead, it took place on a small fishing vessel that would be over capacity with ten people.

It perhaps went without saying, but if they couldn't stand without somewhere to hold, the sailors wouldn't be able to work. Tying knots, mopping the decks, and—if they were a fisherman—drawing in the lines or launching harpoons were all jobs that needed both hands. Therefore, sailors went on their parents' ships from a young age to get a feel for the movement.

"I see," Zenjirou remarked after her explanation. "It is a more technical profession than I had expected. In that respect, I assume even steering with the rudder needs a significant amount of training?"

He had curiously gestured towards a man holding a large wooden wheel in both hands. The man grabbed it by the countless handles along its rim and spun it around in response to the vice captain's directions, so it must have been connected to the rudder.

However, Freya looked shocked for a second. "Indeed. The man currently at the wheel is the helmsman. There are three others able to steer the ship, but there is a distinct difference between an expert and a nonexpert when it comes down to it. If there is a storm or our food supplies are dwindling or we need to get to land as quickly as possible, we have to leave that to the helmsman."

"Oh? You could almost call him an artisan, then."

While Zenjirou was focused more on how impressed he was, Freya and Skaji were holding a nervous conversation with their eyes. It might have been harsh to call Zenjirou's comments careless, but they had led to him rising in their estimation while also increasing their wariness of him.

Ships that relied on a wheel like the *Glafir's Leaf* were the latest technology on the Northern Continent. That style of steering was only found on three-masted ships or above. There were multiple gears of different sizes that connected the rudder on the ship's keel to the wheel a person controlled it with. They used leverage in order to make the steering lighter, and just spinning the wheel was easier to understand. There was a scale above it that let you see how many turns you'd taken from neutral either to the left or right.

On the other hand, smaller ships normally used a tiller that was directly

connected to the rudder with a long, thick shaft. You would push it to either side to control the ship. Those primitive ships needed two or three big men to steer in rough seas, and they were hard to make precise adjustments with. Freya's crew had borrowed shipwrights from Capua to repair the vessel, but each and every one of them had been unaware of the steering system and asked curiously after it. It went without saying that those shipwrights would have been the absolute best Capua had to offer.

So why did Zenjirou seem to understand the technology on sight and pay it no real mind when the experts were completely blindsided by it? There was, of course, the possibility that the shipwrights had reported the information back to the capital, but Zenjirou didn't seem to be acting that way in her estimation. He seemed to see a ship's wheel as completely natural.

He distilled spirits, and he knew about using a wheel to steer a ship. From Freya's perspective, he was a man of many mysteries.

Naturally, neither Zenjirou nor Aura were *hiding* that he came from another world, but with Freya's homeland focusing on technology rather than magic, she didn't really comprehend what that meant. This did, however, emphasize that he was a person with a different knowledge base and sense of values than Capuans.

Even as that revelation was occurring, the *Glasisir's Leaf's* final checks were being carried out. The sailors moved briskly about, steering the ship in accordance with the vice captain's commands. The plan was for the *Glasisir's Leaf* to trace out a large circle on the open sea and then return to Valentia.

Of course, they called it a circle, but the very nature of sailing ships meant there were directions they could not advance in. For those sections of the water, they had to zig-zag. Plus, the wind's direction and strength were not constant, so the circle naturally was somewhat distorted. Being able to tell that they were following a circular path at all even from Zenjirou's position on the ship was telling of the sailor's skills.

Eventually, they turned to head back into the harbor. The final checks must have been completed.

Zenjirou let out an unconscious sigh of relief as he saw the city getting bigger

in front of them. It was not that he hadn't trusted Freya, but boarding a foreign ship in and of itself was an unnerving act. Returning to port gave a real sense of "safely finishing the journey."

"That's the thrill you just don't get with teleportation," he muttered to himself as he looked towards the city.

There was certainly no real refinement to traveling via teleportation. Sailing, in comparison, had an elegance to it.

Of course, when offered the choice between "fast but inelegant," and vice versa, most people would pick the former.

The ship returned to port while Zenjirou was considering that. Arriving at the jetty in a single movement while in such a big ship was no mean feat, but these sailors had succeeded at intercontinental travel. They brought the ship's huge frame alongside the stone jetty without incident.

However, safely docking and dropping anchor did not mean they could immediately disembark. An amateur like Zenjirou would struggle to do so without the gangway, and the sailors had plenty of other work to do. They would need to securely moor the ship and gather any leftover slack, among other things.

In the midst of the flurry of activity, Zenjirou remained holding on to the handrail.

Currently, he couldn't get off the ship, and doing anything else would be a nuisance, so he could only keep himself out of the way as much as possible. Freya then arrived, smiling at him in a way that could only mean the task was complete.

"The *Glasis's Leaf* has completed its shakedown," she said. "Thank you once again, Your Majesty. This is all thanks to the cooperation that Capua has offered us."

As she spoke, Freya gave an elegant bow. However, it was with her right fist on her left shoulder as she bowed her head—a man's bow. Likely because on the ship, she was not a princess, but a captain.

Knowing that it was slightly unseemly, Zenjirou kept a hand behind him on the

railing as he turned to face Freya. “Likewise, our country’s craftsmen have gained valuable experience from this.”

That was no falsehood. Naturally, it wouldn’t be enough to immediately start building large ships, but it was plenty of experience to serve as a foundation.

Her smile deepened. “I am glad to hear it, Your Majesty,” she replied. “Now that the *Glafir’s Leaf* is repaired, we must return to our homeland.”

It was an obvious statement to make but still shocking to an extent that surprised him. “Eh? Ah, of course. When were you planning on returning?”

Despite the annoyance he felt about the concubine side of things, he knew that he enjoyed spending time with her like this. It was at least pleasant enough that he would miss their time together.

Whether she knew of his thoughts or not, she smiled at him as she answered. “Well, ideally we will leave the month after next. Embarrassing as it is to admit, the blazing season of Capua is hard on us. Next month will be even hotter, so I cannot discount the possibility that some of my subordinates will be in a poor state. Therefore, I suppose the middle of winter—the active season—or even a month after that will be when we depart.”

Zenjirou looked questioningly at her. “I can understand the burden the blazing season represents, but will it truly take several months to recover?”

The question was well-founded. The middle of the blazing season was—if you forced it to conform to the Gregorian calendar—effectively August. On the other hand, the middle month of the active season was February, or March if it was another month after. There was essentially half a year between the two months. As a real-world analogy, however poorly the Swedes dealt with the heat, surely it wouldn’t take half a year for them to recover from some heat exhaustion?

Freya shook her head, though, sending her short hair swaying. “I am, of course, not that concerned about the heat. I imagine a dozen or so days after the blazing season would be enough for them to recover. The problem is the season itself and how long it would take to return,” she explained. “It took us approximately a hundred and twenty days to arrive here after we left Uppasala. The storm and unknown route will have had some effect, so we should be able

to return slightly more quickly. I would still conservatively estimate it would be a hundred days, though. If we leave in the opening days of the active season, we will inevitably need to cross the winter sea.”

“Ah, that wouldn’t go well,” he answered, easily accepting the explanation.

The start of the active season would be October. A hundred days later—around three months—would be January. In Capua, that would be the most pleasant time of year, but *winter* to the Uppasalans was quite the opposite.

Cutting-edge or not, the *Glasisir’s Leaf* was still a wooden boat. Sailing absolutely required some exposure to the elements, and even the sheltered areas were not heated like a modern passenger ship. The ocean currents apparently kept their ports free of ice, but the air temperature dropped like a rock. A long voyage when the temperature could be twenty or even thirty degrees below freezing was absolutely perilous. “Swedes” they may be, but there were limits to acclimatization. There was no need to purposefully head out into freezing waters where even the sea spray could give you frostbite in five minutes without precautions. If you went overboard, you could even die from the shock.

The heat of the blazing season in Valentia was too much for the Uppasalans, while the cold in their equivalent of the active season was too harsh. In addition, the trip took three months, so the times they could travel between the two countries were extremely limited. Therefore, now that the ship had been repaired, Freya would need to make preparations to return at the first opportunity. After all, they could not just come and go as they pleased.

“So, if the sailors are well, you will be leaving at the end of this season?”

The silver-haired princess nodded firmly in response. Then, she shrugged and took a deep breath before speaking to him with a nervous smile. “That is my intent, yes. However, I wish to convince my father and brother to one day allow me to return. Your Majesty, will you welcome me then?”

Zenjirou’s expression tightened. The question wasn’t just the literal meaning of the words. Her “return” after convincing her father and brother would be for no other reason than to become Zenjirou’s concubine.

Freya specifically asking him was more to confirm that it was still the case. It

was a question he was hesitant to answer. If he was going to refuse her, this was his last opportunity to do so. If he agreed now, there would be no going back.

Then again, it's not like I can kill the trade deal just because I'm being selfish.

He didn't have many options here. He was intelligent and logical enough to know that, on top of his personality being such that he couldn't actually refuse her.

"Of course, Princess Freya. Queen Aura and I will be eagerly awaiting your eventual return."

The smiling declaration was unavoidable now. It was a firm statement that he would accept Freya as a concubine. Purposefully adding Aura's name to the statement was his way of emphasizing what resistance he could make. It was also a statement that as long as Aura was his wife, if their relationship remained good, he could accept Freya as a concubine.

Freya herself was probably expecting that. Naturally, having someone you had admitted your feelings for tell you he would prioritize another woman was not pleasant, but Freya was not careless enough to show it.

"I will return. To you, Your Majesty," she said with a smile and misty eyes.

Despite her outfit being that of a man, her expression was most certainly that of a woman.

Chapter 5 — Aura Capua

About a month had passed since General Pujol had led his vanguard from the city. Several dwarf wyverns had just arrived in the capital. The messages they carried had been sent by the general and said his troop had arrived with no losses, preparations were complete, and Zenjirou could join them whenever he wished.

Aura's first comment when she saw the documents was not related to their contents but rather the creatures that had delivered them.

"Two arrived. I instructed him to send ten simultaneously due to the importance."

"It is due to the distances between our two capitals. One or two more may arrive in the coming days, but you should assume that over half of them will not return," said her secretary.

The queen frowned as she adjusted her loose dress and simply replied, "I know."

She had entered the stable period of her pregnancy and was beginning to show, so she was sitting on the front of the seat, leaning against the backrest to keep the pressure off her stomach. She glared up at the ceiling without changing position.

"I know, but it is still worrying. The dwarf wyverns he was provided with were all carefully chosen."

The country raised many dwarf wyverns for sending information, but there was, of course, a degree of variance in their abilities. A domestic message was one thing, but the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle lay in the center of the continent, while Capua was on the western coast. The only dwarf wyverns capable of such journeys were the strong, young specimens.

Crossing half the continent was dangerous, even for those handpicked wyverns. The longer a journey was, the greater the chance they would be

attacked by predators or their homing instinct would fail and they would fly somewhere else.

Still, losing so many at once was concerning. Unfortunately, there was not yet a way to solve that problem. All she could do was rely on the breeders.

Regardless, her position as queen did not allow her to continue thinking about dwarf wyverns forever. Changing track, she dropped her eyes to the contents of the letter.

“Whatever else, the guard force has safely arrived, then. All that remains is for me to send the bare minimum of people and then my husband.”

She glared once again at the ceiling, considering who she should send. The first would be Natalio and Ines, without question. She would probably also need to send several of the inner palace maids to ensure that Zenjirou could relax. The guard force that had traveled overland was, as the name implied, mostly composed of male soldiers. A long trip in the blazing season meant that the maids would be a burden, so they had been unable to take them along.

On the other hand, some of the people from the Twin Kingdoms who had gone home included several of Francesco and Bona’s maids, but the general’s statement that there were “no losses” meant they had probably arrived safely as well.

Aura marveled at the situation slightly. “Magic tools certainly seem to make all the difference. I suppose there is also the familiarity.”

One of the two families ruling the country—the Gilbelles—made an exceptionally large number of journeys abroad to provide healing. Therefore, the country had maids who were used to traveling to accompany them. Naturally, they also had the enchanters of the Sharou family, so they also focused on making magic tools to ease such journeys. On the whole, this had made the Twin Kingdoms a country much more capable of travel than most others. Having suffered through camping during the war, Aura was rather envious.

“Regardless of anything else, the preparations are now all in place. When are you planning to send the maids?” Fabio asked.

“Indeed. Well, first I wish to speak to Prince Francesco and Princess Bona. I think problems will be highly unlikely, but my husband’s safety must come first. I would like the prince to get confirmation as well.”

The Twin Kingdoms had something called “dual burn parchment.” It was two sheets of drake parchment that would burn in exactly the same way. You could burn letters into it with a scribe to write, which allowed instant, if limited, communication over any distance.

“I concur. Our relations are good, so I think it highly improbable they will act in such a way, but there are exceptions to everything,” the secretary agreed.

That afternoon, Aura met with the two royals from the Twin Kingdoms in a room of the royal palace. She had only contacted them that morning, so meeting them the same day was a rather nimble reaction for royalty. In Francesco’s case, however, that was the standard, so there was no need to be shocked now.

As ever, she was sitting on a sofa facing the two foreign royals. The only differences were that Aura had used the assistance of a maid to seat herself due to the extra swell of her stomach and that she had more guards closer to her.

She stretched out in a slightly languid position to keep the weight off her stomach and started with the greetings and auxiliary matters. “My thanks for responding to my request so rapidly. And speaking of thanks, Princess Bona. I have had the decorative candlestick you made placed within the gardens. I will be holding a banquet to unveil it and will invite you both. Princess Bona will, of course, be the guest of honor.”

Bona had been separately invited as a guest of honor to a banquet in Capua. Considering her origins as low nobility, it was a fairly heavy burden, but she was currently a full-fledged member of the Twin Kingdoms’ royalty.

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” she answered, suppressing her nerves and forcing a smile. “I will look forward to it.” The smile might have been forced to hide the unease and pressure she felt, but she really was excited about it.

The candlestick in question, gifted to the royal family, was entirely her own work. While she was naturally concerned about criticism, she wanted to see it

exposed to public attention and to hear people's thoughts on it even more. As she imagined that, the false smile gradually became a real smile.

Aura found her eyes softening into a smile of her own. "We will do our utmost not to betray your expectations. Incidentally, Prince Francesco?" she said, turning the conversation towards the male in the meeting.

"Yes? What is it, Your Majesty?" He showed no unease at being the sudden center of attention, simply smiling.

"I have received word that the troops I sent last month have arrived safely at the capital of the Twin Kingdoms. Have you received any report?"

Francesco met the fiery-haired queen's gaze head-on and nodded frankly. "I have. Everyone has arrived safely, it seems. Here is the transcript," he answered, pulling a sheet of drake parchment from his pocket and laying it on the table.

Dual burn parchment was both valuable and slightly dangerous, so bringing it in directly would be dangerous. If whoever had the corresponding sheet happened to burn it, this sheet would automatically start to burn. They were usually kept in metal or stone boxes that were nonflammable to prevent any accidents.

"Hmm, I shall take a look. Conversely, here is my own communication," she said, placing the parchment from the dwarf wyvern on the table.

There was silence as the three royals compared the two short sheets of writing. There was not much to compare, but the date of arrival on each matched.

With that, she could trust both that the general's men had arrived and that the other country was ready to greet them.

"Indeed, it would seem your country is now playing host to our knights. You have my thanks."

"Not at all. We gained from this as well, after all. While it was not all of them, we have managed to ease the homesickness of some of our men. Incidentally, considering they are ready, will His Majesty soon be sent to the Twin Kingdoms?"

The queen nodded. “We are making preparations to do so, yes. It is not imminent, but I would say he will be on his way within ten days.”

The prince leaned forward and spoke joyously. “Oh, good news indeed! Once that has been solved, would I be able to prevail upon you to also send us back as promised?”

“What?!” Bona, for her part, was shocked.

Presuming that the prince had yet to explain to her, Aura turned to the chestnut-haired princess and smiled. “Once my husband reaches the Twin Kingdoms, there will be a person capable of casting teleportation within your capital. That will mean a day trip between our two cities will become possible, if only for a single person per day. When this season finishes, you will have both been here for a year, and I doubt it is only the soldiers who long for home. I can send the two of you there, and my husband can later send you back. Would you wish to return to your own lands while he is staying there?”

“That makes sense...” Bona managed to say through her daze.

While she had been protected by seasoned soldiers used to travel, she had gone to great pains to get to Capua. So even if Bona mentally understood what Aura was saying, emotionally, it was a different matter.

“That’s how it is,” Francesco stated. “I’ll be taking her up on it. What about you?”

The princess, in her role as his minder, gave the prince a reproachful look as he smiled blankly. “Your Highness, please inform me of this sort of thing beforehand. I dislike dealing with sudden events.”

“Oh? So you’re not coming back?”

“No, I am. That is exactly why. I need to make preparations that I cannot without prior knowledge.”

The two foreigners had grown completely at home in the royal palace of Capua, and Aura interrupted their double act with a soft smile.

“While Prince Francesco was certainly careless, this is also partially my fault. Despite both of you being concerned, I only spoke with Prince Francesco and

forgot to inform you directly. My apologies, Princess Bona. Forgive me.”

While it was a light apology, the *queen* of a nation like Capua apologizing to Bona made the princess shake her head so strongly it felt like it was about to shower silver dust.

“Not at all. My apologies for making such a display of our lack of communication!” Bona apologized back.

“In that case, do you also wish to return home temporarily?”

“I would very much like to. Ah, how should I show my thanks?”

Another country’s royalty using their lineal magic for another was not free. If it was given at no cost now, they could expect an even more bothersome request in the future. Even Bona, with her relatively little experience as royalty, knew that much. However, her worries were, in a certain sense, pointless.

“I’ll be paying for it all,” Francesco said with a grin. “It’ll be a magic tool.”

In contrast to his smile, Bona’s lip started to tremble. If teleportation was Capua’s trump card, then making magic tools was the Sharous’.

“Your Highness! Why would you say that so lightly?!”

Francesco was supposed to be under her supervision, and he’d made a careless contract while under that supervision. Bona promptly forgot she was sitting in front of another country’s monarch and started shrilly scolding the prince.



Several days later, Zenjirou was in a room in the royal palace. He was wearing both the third uniform and a tense look.

Next to him was Natalio. Zenjirou had become significantly more familiar with the knight recently. Natalio was also wearing his dress uniform as well as a leather helmet that came down to cover his cheeks. His expression wasn’t visible, but there was a nervous air to him as well.

In front of the pair was Zenjirou’s beloved wife, Queen Aura. She was wearing a loose-fitting red dress to keep any restriction off her protruding stomach. Her somber expression, though, showed she was just as serious about matters as

the two men.

She spoke in a voice that perfectly fit her expression, low and quiet. “This is your last chance. Are you ready?”

“I-I am.”

Zenjirou’s expression and tone implied he was much less ready than he claimed. Still, that was hardly a shock. Aura was about to teleport him to the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle. He could make logical arguments to himself as much as he liked. Yes, the journey would be instant. Yes, he had learned the spell himself, so he could return easily. And yes, he would be a guest of absolute honor, so wouldn’t be treated poorly. None of that could simply wipe away his fear of stepping into the unknown.

In the worst case, the Twin Kingdoms could have armed soldiers waiting for him, and Zenjirou would have no way to resist. There was a token form of resistance by sending Natalio immediately before him, but a single knight would be little more than a stepping-stone if the Twin Kingdoms were determined. The only thing he could do was trust that the country’s logical judgment would prevail.

Aura continued, “I will now be sending you to the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle. Several maids—starting with Ines—have been sent over the past few days, so I imagine they will be entirely ready to receive you. However, it is an unavoidable truth that things do not necessarily go to plan. You should assume that you will have at least some level of discomfort.”

“I understand, my queen.”

With this being the royal palace, and with Natalio at his side, the discussion between the two was that of queen and prince consort.

“You must also not waver from your goal in this visit. It goes without saying, but they will prioritize their own circumstances over ours.”

“Understood.”

Zenjirou was going to the Twin Kingdoms in order to build ties with the Gilbelle Papacy and get into a position where he could summon a healer for their second child’s birth. However, the Twin Kingdoms was, as the name

implied, a country that had two royal families standing abreast. Unfortunately, the family that had the most interest in Zenjirou was not the Gilbelles, but the other family—the Sharous.

Zenjirou's distant ancestors were a prince of the Capuan family and a princess of the Sharou family, who had eloped to Earth. As the Southern Continent determined royal status through the presence or absence of lineal magic, there were very few royals who had *two* lineal magics dwelling in their blood.

In the same way that Aura could never ignore his rarity, the Sharou family would likely act in much the same way. While there was an agreement between the two countries, Aura was certain that Zenjirou going to their land would see much more proactive attempts to take him in.

The queen kept her expression deadly serious as she continued. "While the Sharou and Gilbelle families are by no means a monolith, they have spent hundreds of years alongside each other. You should assume there is a significant possibility that there will be agreements in place between them both. In other words, there is a significant chance that even should you attempt to create ties to the Gilbelle family, you will first need to deal with the Sharou family."

"I understand."

It was something Aura had explained in the inner palace beforehand, but verbalizing it made his expression cloud. It was obvious when he considered it, though.

Zenjirou had business with the Gilbelle family, and the Sharou family had business with him. It was therefore only natural that the Sharous would have negotiated ahead of time with the Gilbelles. Of course, considering the greater than expected conflict of influence between the families, there was a chance they had not been able to do so yet. Still, assuming the best without proof was far from a wise course of action.

Once Zenjirou shook himself off, he spoke with conviction. "I understand the situation, and I will do my utmost to have good news for you."

"I will be awaiting such news," she said with a smile that didn't reach her eyes, answering her deferent husband. At this point, there was no reason to

drag things out further. “I will now be casting teleportation to the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle. First, Knight Natalio,” she declared.

“Yes ma’am!” the knight exclaimed, standing to attention after his silence thus far.

“I believe danger to be a remote chance, but if that chance comes to pass, you are our only sword and shield. I am counting on you.”

“Even should it cost my life!”

The queen nodded in satisfaction at the young knight’s earnest reply. “You have my faith, Sir Natalio. I believe that you have not yet visited the Twin Kingdoms. I have already sent Kate there. Both maids and knights have at least a degree of time to themselves, and I will not fault you for taking the time to talk once again as brother and sister. A foreign land you may be in, but you can update each other on your situations.”

The young knight’s expression relaxed slightly at that. “I thank you for your consideration.”

Aura had spent the days up until yesterday sending some of the maids from the inner palace. One of them had been Natalio Maldonado’s younger sister, Kate. Once someone entered the inner palace, it became very difficult to remain in close contact. Natalio was grateful that Aura had made it possible in this way.

Their family was one of knights, so small that a gust of wind could blow it away. Despite that, it was currently the focus of a significant amount of attention. There was no shock there. The brother, Natalio, was currently Zenjirou’s only personal knight, and his sister was—albeit one of many—a maid for him. From an external perspective, the family was the closest to the prince consort.

They had therefore received an avalanche of requests to marry Kate. As the daughter of an untitled family of knights, marrying a baron would be cause for celebration, and marriage to a viscount would see ballads written to celebrate it, but some of the requests had come from counts and marquises. The siblings’ parents were therefore spending their days feeling like their insides were devouring themselves, and Natalio wanted to talk to her about that.

“Indeed. I doubt I need to remind you, but this is a discussion as *family*, and in free time alone.”

“Of course, Your Majesty. I understand.”

Aura nodded once as the man marshaled his expression and adjusted his hold on the short spear in his right hand. Then, she pointed her palm towards him.

“I shall begin, then. *Send all things in the space that I envision to the place that I desire. As compensation, I offer—*”

As soon as she finished her incantation, the knight suddenly vanished.

Queen Aura and her prince consort were now the only two in the room.

Their expressions changed almost simultaneously as they looked silently at each other. What had been queen and prince consort were now husband and wife.

“I need to send you soon, so we do not have much time...”

“Yeah, so let’s get this done quick,” he replied, inferring what she meant. He approached his pregnant wife and held her more gently than normal.

“Mmhh...”

“Mm...hmmm...”

Then, they kissed. They had already done so in the inner palace. But this was the absolute last chance they had, so it had to be taken. Either way, it was different than on previous occasions. He was, in an entirely literal sense, moving abroad.

That said, Zenjirou’s own mastery of teleportation meant that the practical distance between them was less than it had been even domestically.

“I doubt you will have the chance until Prince Francesco and Princess Bona return temporarily. Once they have, though, return periodically to report.”

“Got it. I’m planning on coming back once every ten days,” he answered with a smile, arm still around her waist.

Normally, embracing her from the front would bring her breasts to rest against his chest, but her stomach was swollen enough that it hit first. With

thoughts of the child within it, he contented himself with the light embrace and let her slip back through his arms so he could put a hand on her stomach.

“Is it already moving?” he asked.

“Sometimes it seems to be, but other times not. It would seem this child is a slower mover than Carlos was. I have thus far had no morning sickness, so it seems to be less demanding.”

“Maybe it’ll be a girl? I’ll think of names for either, though.”

The conversation at hand made him think of their other child in the inner palace.

“I wonder how Zenkichi’s doing? I wish I could go see him again before I go.”

“Heading for the inner palace now is out of the question. Besides, you spent so much time with Carlos last night, was it not enough?” The judgmental look she sent him made him look around for an excuse.

“It’s more that I want to see him any time I’ve got a chance. Anyway, I can’t, so I’ll bear with it.”

“Please do. Zenjirou, it feels a little late, but *please* do not push yourself too hard. The Sharou family will be doing their best to get you. Do not be alone with them. Take at least Ines and Natalio, or someone else if it should come to it. If possible, do not meet any of the Sharou family without those two with you. If the worst should come to pass, being unable to call for a healer is acceptable. If it comes to it, leave the others and escape with teleportation. Know that nothing else comes above your safety.”

“Right. Thanks,” he said, a smile parting his lips at her earnest concern for him.

In truth, she doubted that Zenjirou would be able to escape “if it came to it.” Even at his best, he could only cast the spell seventy percent of the time. In an emergency, it would be almost zero percent. The fact that she still stressed escaping alone if it came to it was for his periodic returns to Capua. If there were issues, he would not return.

He gave a deep sigh, then spoke. “You say that there isn’t anything more

important than my safety. For me, though, going there and making sure I can get a healer for the birth is just as important. I'm planning on negotiating properly because of that," he told her.

"Zenjirou..." She was worried by his words, but there was still a conflicted smile on her lips. She couldn't hide the joy his statement had given her. "A healer from the Gilbelle Papacy is certainly a reassurance, but unless there is a problem, they are not *indispensable*. I am strong for a woman, and Doctor Michel is skilled enough that I am willing to trust him with my life."

She wasn't telling him not to go at this point; she was just worried that Zenjirou would fall into a trap of feeling like they needed a healer no matter what.

There were risks in going to the negotiating table intent on making an agreement happen come hell or high water. Particularly when it was more emotional than practical, as it was in this case. Aura felt like she had to tell him that he did not need to make this succeed no matter the cost.

"I know. I won't lose sight of my own safety. Making you worry would completely defeat the point. I'll not push myself as much as possible, but I can't do *nothing*. If you really think things are going badly, then I'll follow your instructions, but will you let me try until then?"

"Very well," she said after a pause, smiling. "Do what you can. Ill-fitting as it may be to bring up here and now, I hear you gave Princess Freya an agreement."

Hearing another woman's name leave his wife's lips, Zenjirou jolted and couldn't hold her gaze.

"Ah, yeah. I did." Zenjirou had originally been against it, and Aura had overruled his objections and continued things.

There was therefore no reason for him to act like this, but he couldn't quite shake his tendencies as a modern man. He couldn't help the guilt. As a member of royalty, Aura could not understand his feelings, but their conversations let her infer them.

"Thank you, Zenjirou. I have truly burdened you with this. I do not know how

much this will lighten the burden on you, but I will say it regardless: I love you. Whatever relationships you form with Princess Freya or any other woman, my feelings towards you will not change in the slightest.”

In a certain light, her statement was both the truth and a bluff. For Aura, being a member of royalty, it was completely normal for a man to have several wives. That did not, however, mean that she would feel no jealousy if her husband were to be whispering sweet nothings into another woman’s ear.

In reality, there were very few families where the legal wives and concubines got along well. However, she had assigned him a woman due to the country’s circumstances, so she would not show those feelings in front of him. She could not.

Zenjirou smiled awkwardly back at his wife as she pushed all of those feelings behind a smile of her own. “Thanks, it does make me feel a bit better. I will do my best to make sure things go as well with Princess Freya as they can. I’m sure she isn’t a bad person.”

“I see,” Aura answered after a pause. Her chest had immediately begun to ache as he praised Freya.

“I think I’ll *need* to try,” he continued. “With you, at least, just being together makes me happy.” He wasn’t particularly putting Freya down with that, just explicitly saying that he felt more love for Aura than he would Freya.

“I...see...” There was a faint sense of vindictive victory welling up in her chest. She chuckled. “I see indeed. Very well; when it comes to pass, I will do my best to make sure Princess Freya can be comfortable within the inner palace.”

“Yeah.”

Her expression was now full of confidence that she would always be his number one. A close husband and wife, precisely because their thoughts were so in tune, could continue a conversation for a long time. However, she had already sent Natalio to the Twin Kingdoms, and he had been told that Zenjirou would immediately follow him. They couldn’t leave him for too long.

Zenjirou checked his watch and then let out a regretful sigh. “It’s time, then.”

“Indeed, there is no avoiding it. So, Zenjirou, this is your absolute last chance.

Are you ready?"

"Yup," he answered shortly.

He couldn't renege here. He would take on the mantle of royalty, go to another country, and negotiate. Just the thought made him want to run away in fear, but the memories of their last child's birth were clear in his mind. He remembered the powerless wait as his beloved wife literally put her own life on the line to bring another life into this world. This effort would be worth it if he didn't have to feel the same way again. It was no bluff or self-deceit; he simply felt that way.

"Please, Aura," he said.

"Very well. Here I go. *Send all things in the space that I envision to the place that I desire. As compensation, I offer—*"

Epilogue — Lucretia Broglie

Zenjirou listened to his beloved wife chant the spell with his eyes closed, and when he opened them, was greeted by the sight of a different room. Unlike the room that had just contained him and Aura, this one had multiple people standing in a row and was relatively big.

Seeing the multiple armed men, Zenjirou thought for a moment that the worst had indeed come to pass. It was a needless concern, though. His eyes soon fell upon the—annoying, but welcome in this instance—general of Capua, Pujol Guillén.

“Sir Zenjirou. On behalf of us all, I wish to welcome you on your safe arrival.”

The refined mannerisms and the man’s massive frame clashed. Zenjirou kept a royal expression on his face and lifted a hand while answering. “I am glad to see you, general. Do as you see fit.”

“Sir.”

Having exchanged words with the general and calmed down, he managed to take in his surroundings. A less tense glance around revealed other familiar faces. Natalio—who had been sent moments before him—was accompanied by several maids from the inner palace, including Ines. There were other soldiers around Natalio that he remembered as well. They were the men who had been Natalio’s subordinates and acted as Zenjirou’s guard force when they had gone to the Gaziél march. Aura had only sent Natalio and the maids by teleportation, so the other soldiers had spent days traveling by foot through the blazing season.

I’ll need to reward them in some way later.

The fact that that kind of thought came to him without trying was possibly proof that he was more familiar with his position as royalty than he thought.

Honestly, though, it really feels like I’m abroad, even at a glance. Capua feels like a southern country back on Earth, or maybe India, but this is more like the

Middle East, I guess? The air feels really dry as well. Over half the country's desert, I think.

Given his position, he couldn't look around like some country bumpkin, but he still found it difficult to contain his curiosity. The furniture and the flooring were obviously different, but even the layout of the room was foreign. Zenjirou didn't know enough to say *how*, only that it was clearly different. This was, without a doubt, another country and another culture.

The occupants could see that he had put himself at ease now. Several people with lighter skin and hair approached him from where they had been waiting off to the side. It went without saying that these were the nobles of the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle.

The sequence of events was likely more or less planned. The Capuan military the general led made no argument and granted them space to pass. Unexpectedly, or perhaps not, the person leading the group was a slight girl. By Zenjirou's estimation, she seemed about the same age as Nilda had in the march. In other words, she was around fifteen, at most. Her straight blonde hair was collected together at the side of her head in what was often called a side ponytail.

She came to a stop in front of him and lifted her skirt in a curtsy. "Welcome to the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gilbelle, Your Majesty Zenjirou. Our people as a whole welcome you from the depths of their hearts. I am Lucretia, and I offer you greetings from the Broglie family as their representative."

She gave a respectful bow of her head, letting her neatly tied hair swing forward at her side.

A step behind her, the well-dressed men and women around her also bowed their heads.

The Broglie family? Not the royal family?

Zenjirou had been ready for a honeytrap of an "assassin" from the Sharou family, so he was slightly slow in replying. "I am Zenjirou, husband of Her Majesty Queen Aura I of Capua. I am overjoyed to have the opportunity to visit a long-time allied nation such as yours. I look forward to my stay."

“Thank you. While we may fall short in places, we will do our utmost to live up to your expectations,” the girl said. Her smile couldn’t quite hide her nervousness. “I do apologize for the walk, but if I may guide you?”

Aura had already explained why Lucretia would say that. Countries that Capua had good relationships with had specific buildings in order to accept teleports. This was one of them. Those buildings were the only places Capua was permitted to use as a destination. Without that agreement, it could—in the most extreme cases—be argued that the Capuan royals might be involved if something went missing in the palace or if there was an assassination.

It was widely known that successfully casting magic required three components: the correct pronunciation, the correct amount of mana, and the correct visualization. Therefore, a promise not to use a spell outside of specific areas meant that the knowledge that you were breaking the promise would interfere with the visualization and lead to a lower success rate.

Of course, this was nothing more than an extra mental hurdle, so someone of Aura’s skill could still manage it. However, it would be a much more difficult goal for an amateur like Zenjirou.

“I do not object; you may,” he told the girl.

“This way,” she replied.

He almost felt like the side ponytail was leading him.

Ah, damn it, the photos, Zenjirou suddenly realized. He needed to photograph the room to use with the spell, but getting the camera out now would draw too much attention. He’d have to worry about it later. There would surely be another opportunity.

The soldiers—starting with General Pujol—formed up around Zenjirou. Naturally, the knights closest to him for his protection were Natalio and his direct subordinates. Ines and the maids followed on behind them.

While they walked, Zenjirou kept his gaze on the girl who called herself Lucretia, but there was a strange feeling that something wasn’t right.

Hmm? I wonder what it is? It seems like something’s a bit off.

His impression from the conversation they'd had, short as it was, made him think Lucretia was a noble of high birth. Her actions and diction were both far more advanced than her young appearance would imply. However, watching her walk from behind like this was putting him off for some reason.

What is it? he asked himself. *Something's definitely off.*

Just as the thought passed through his mind, the girl in front of him caught her foot in her skirt and fell forward. The woman behind her managed to catch her arm by a hair's breadth, so it ended without incident. It was still far from a ladylike bearing, though.

"M-My apologies," Lucretia said, stopping and turning to face him. "That was a shameful display."

Her face was cherry red.



The way she brought her shoulders up and hunched in on herself made him think of a turtle hiding in its shell. The comparison finally let Zenjirou realize what had felt so out of place.

“Lucretia, pardon my asking, but does that dress perhaps not fit you well?”

Her movements were much clumsier than her words. It—and her tripping over her own dress—was because it was too big. Looking properly, the sleeves covered half of her hands, and the hem was low enough that it dragged on the floor. The collar was more open than it should have been as well, and she looked like a girl playing dress-up in her older sister’s dress.

Seeing the slight and young-looking girl in a too-big dress was amusing and cute, but not something a noble girl of high birth would ever do. However, the girl’s face grew even redder as she craned her neck.

“I-It is of no concern. I will grow before long,” she insisted.

Apparently unable to let the claim pass, the woman at her side interjected. “Lady Lucy, you insisted that so many of those dresses be made before coming of age by saying exactly that, but you have not grown at all, have you? Even His Majesty has noticed, so perhaps we should have a new one made.”

“Flora!” Lucretia protested in embarrassment.

This was the woman who had caught Lucretia when she fell. Considering she was using a nickname to refer to the younger girl, they must have been rather close.

At any rate, none of this was appropriate behavior in front of another country’s royalty, but Lucretia looked young, so people seeing it would find it charming instead. Rather than calling attention to it, the soldiers all relaxed at the adorable and amusing sight and smiled slightly.

“Lucretia, this is an interesting conversation, but could you continue guiding us?” Zenjirou asked. Even he was smiling without thinking about it, having forgotten his nerves from the transition.

A little while later, Zenjirou was in an annex of the royal palace. It was a separate building that fell under the Sharou family’s royal palace and was called

the Purple Egg Palace. As the name implied, the first features you saw were that the building itself was predominantly purple, and the ceiling protruded out in an orb.

On Earth, in the Middle East, there were buildings that had roofs that looked like an onion with a spike sticking out of the top. Perhaps the easiest way to describe *this* building was to take one of them and remove the spike.

It was hard to relax entirely in a room that so completely reminded him that he was abroad. However, Zenjirou currently only had his relatively close confidants, Natalio and the maids, around him, so he got about eighty percent of the way there. He sank down into a chair and let out a deep sigh, rolling his neck to work out a crick.

“Here, Sir Zenjirou.”

“Ah, thanks.”

He accepted the chalice of water from the young maid and downed it in a single breath. It didn’t measure up to the water chilled in his fridge, but it was plenty cold considering the blazing season.

“It was a fair old walk,” he commented to himself, checking the watch on his left arm.

He hadn’t checked the exact time they had left the teleportation building, but it had been at least half an hour, and probably closer to a full hour of walking to reach here.

“It feels like the building is a decent way into the palace complex as a whole,” he commented with a slightly wary tone. Natalio’s expression tightened as he agreed.

“It is. According to General Pujol, the building is a good way into the complex. The Sharou’s ‘inner palace’ is not far either. The teleportation building is directly between the Purple Egg Palace and the Divine White Palace, so it is a significant difference.”

The blatant nature of it brought a twisted grin to Zenjirou’s lips as his wariness grew. Normally, having a royal and their vast array of guards so close to your stronghold was a risky endeavor. However, the Sharou family must be

prioritizing keeping Zenjirou close over mitigating that risk.

“We should assume it will be hard to get into contact with the Gilbelles for the time being,” Zenjirou murmured to himself.

“Indeed,” Ines agreed. “In addition, it is an unfortunate fact that teleportation is forbidden outside of emergency in foreign countries without that country’s permission. It may be slightly difficult to return to Capua for a while.”

Simply coming and going on a whim when one was being treated as a state guest would put the hosts in a poor position. Therefore, even with teleportation as an option, Zenjirou could not return to Capua as and when he pleased.

Naturally, the Kingdom of Sharou didn’t wish to give Zenjirou—or Capua behind him—a poor impression, so they wouldn’t actively confine him. However, they were certainly likely to not allow the usage of teleportation without some reason being given.

“I am ready for that,” Zenjirou replied. “Though with that said, Her Majesty is back in Capua, pregnant. If they try to drag things out for too long, I will make my objections known. You should all be ready for that as well.”

“Understood, sir,” replied Natalio. He and his men’s expressions tightened at the oddly firm statement from Zenjirou.

His goal was, when it came down to it, to secure a healer from the Gilbelle Papacy. He would be willing to compromise with the Sharou family’s plans to a certain degree, but folding to everything at the expense of his own desires was not going to happen.

“At any rate, we need to be careful for now, that much is certain,” he sighed.

Natalio considered his liege’s words for a moment before replying. “Speaking of, Sir Zenjirou. I am not certain you should let your guard down around that Lucretia girl.”

“Hm?” One of Zenjirou’s eyebrows rose. Natalio usually remained silent as he guarded him. “What do you mean?”

“It was very skillfully done, so I cannot say for sure. However, it appeared to me that when she tripped and fell on her skirt, it was intentional.”

Zenjirou’s face shifted to a look of surprise. “For what purpose?”

While she may not have been royalty, Marquis Broglie and his family ought to have been of fairly high standing if she was expected to play host to another country’s royalty. Zenjirou couldn’t fathom why she would play up the clumsy angle in that case.

Ines offered some advice from his side as she saw his puzzled expression. “Sir Zenjirou, would you not say that the sequence of events significantly relaxed the mood? In addition, it seemed that you looked upon Lady Lucretia rather favorably.”

“That’s certainly true...” Seeing a young-looking girl like her wearing too-big clothes and claiming she was right on the cusp of a growth spurt had certainly lessened Zenjirou’s wariness significantly. “So you agree that she purposefully acted to do that?” he asked her.

“I am not trained in martial arts like Sir Natalio, so I cannot definitively state whether her actions were purposeful or not. However, I was slightly surprised that the maid—Flora—was able to support her. While Lady Lucretia may be slight, it is surprisingly difficult to brace oneself against another person’s weight with no warning,” Ines offered. “Of course, considering their conversation, there is ample possibility that Lady Lucretia often wears such clothes and both have become accustomed to their roles in such a situation.”

“Hmm...” Zenjirou pondered, folding his arms. He had felt a slight sense of anticlimax that such an innocent girl had been appointed his guide, but if even that was part of the plan, he was in a situation he could not afford to let his guard down. “I’ll keep it in mind,” he said.

His wariness over it ratcheted up another step.



Meanwhile, having finished her grand role of guiding royalty from another great country—Capua—Lucretia Broglie was in a room, alone but for her confidante. She took off what she was wearing in two senses of the phrase.

“Gah! Ugh, this is so annoying. I need to get changed!”

Having shed the oversized dress along with her innocence, the girl quickly got

changed into loungewear with her maid's assistance. The clothes she changed into were plain, a simple dress, in fact. However, they were perfectly tailored to her size.

"Truly, Lady Lucy, you complain every day you do this. You could just wear clothes that fit you properly." Her maid could only offer a defeated shrug.

The blonde girl, though, shook her head. Her side ponytail flew with the motion. "No way. A little baby-faced girl like me looks cute in oversized clothes, playing up the clumsiness. Also, if I wore clothes like this around them, the way men look at me would definitely change," she claimed, puffing up her flat chest with a smug look.

"That is true, but the way women look at you would also change. The disdainful looks at being so obviously fake, that is," the maid replied sharply.

Even so, the girl didn't waver. "I don't care. I can't marry a woman, after all. In fact, I've already come this far, I don't care if all other men but His Majesty hate me either. My victory or defeat lies in whether I will be able to seduce him!" she declared, clenching a tiny fist.

"Personally, I think that staking your whole life on marriage is risky in multiple ways," Flora commented.

"I know the risks," Lucretia protested. "This is the only way I can become royalty, though, so I have no choice!"

The maid let out a very exaggerated sigh. "I understand your resolve and will do my best to aid you in every way I can. So, please, promise not to bring trouble to the Broglie family."

Flora was Lucretia's confidante, but she was employed by the marquis, not by Lucretia personally. Even she faltered when her family name was brought up.

"I-I know. It will be fine. At most, it will be you and I at risk. It won't trouble the Broglie family."

There was a long pause. "And you feel no guilt in dragging me along?"

"Well, you will get to be a confidante of royalty as well. It's a big jump, no?"

"Whether you are royal or noble, you are still you. Even if your station

changes, how I treat you will not.”

“Thank you.”

Whatever the wording, Lucretia trusted that the older woman would not abandon her. There was an oddly good mood that made talking feel awkward, but Flora broke the silence and spoke to her young liege.

“Incidentally, Lady Lucy, I have gathered rumors from the soldiers that have already arrived. They all say that His Majesty is deeply in love with Queen Aura.”

Lucretia’s lip wrinkled as the conversation turned to her target’s relationship with women. “So what? He is royalty. Multiple wives are to be expected. All I need to do is make sure that while he loves Her Majesty, he also loves me.”

“Indeed, that is not the problem. The issue is that Her Majesty is older than him, tall, and with plentiful flesh both above and below. Pardon me, but perhaps your childish charms might have the opposite effect.”

Lucretia shuddered at the statement but soon shook her head and marshaled her thoughts. “That is slightly bad news, but I cannot change my plan now. More accurately, however much I try, I have nothing *but* those childish charms. Trying to act the mature, buxom woman would just be laughable.”

“That is entirely correct.”

The girl looked slightly unhappy at her maid so readily agreeing with the self-deprecation. The information, though, only served to stoke her flames of ambition and prompt further planning.

“Still, this might be a good thing in one way,” Lucretia said. “If I can get closer to him and hear that from his own lips—and I admit this is a big assumption—trying that kind of allure might be effective.”

“While I gave you this information, I feel like attempting to wear alluring clothes may only end in disaster.”

“Silence. This is simply preliminary planning. I’d be a young girl doing my best to act like an adult to match his preferences, but it wouldn’t match, and I’d be teary-eyed. Don’t you think that would make him want to protect me?”

“Truly, you have one cunning plot after another.” Flora’s tone had gone from exasperation to admiration.

The younger girl looked deadly serious as she almost heaved out, “Of course. I have thought of little else since I heard of His Majesty. If I can marry him or at least have his child, I can be royalty. No, I can be royalty *again*.”

Lucretia Broglie. Her biological father was the second prince, Philibert Sharou, and her mother was his legal wife, Jolanda. However, the girl was unable to manipulate the lineal magic of the Sharou family—enchantment—and so was offered to the influential Broglie family for adoption.

“I’ll do anything to be able to publicly call my father ‘father’ or my mother ‘mother,’ anything!”

Her decision was entirely selfish, but that also made it completely imperturbable in the face of any obstacle.

To be continued in *The Ideal Sponger Life 9*.

Appendix — The Lord and Maids' Electric Maintenance

Rain was pounding down in the inner palace's garden. The maids were working under that rain, wearing covering against the deluge.

Garden duty during the rainy season was both a big win and big loss.

The head of the gardens, Emilia, was a taskmaster while on duty, but she was by no means an unfair boss. Therefore, apart from the work that absolutely needed to be done immediately, they were only out when it wasn't raining.

Inevitably, rainy days that didn't have any pressing work consisted of a quick look around in the morning and nothing more. In terms of the work in the rest of the inner palace, it was perhaps the easiest workload of all.

Conversely, though, Emilia was absolutely merciless when there was work to do. For example, if there was work that had to be done come hell or high water within the day, she would chase them out into the gardens and into said high water.

Today was one of those unfortunate days of torrential rain.

"Our checks so far have shown that the water has degraded with the long period of rain. Fortunately, neither Sir Zenjirou nor Her Majesty are returning until the late evening. Therefore, we will be carrying out simple maintenance on the generator."

There was a long, very reluctant pause before Letti, Dolores, and Faye answered the harsh statement with an agreement. Their faces were all pinched. After a period of work, Emilia was once more calling out to them over the lashing rain.

"You are all working too slowly. Can you really call yourselves girls of martial households?"

"Our apologies, Lady Emilia," Dolores replied.

“Focus on getting the work done, not talking, Dolores. Now, we will start cleaning. Do you know the protocol?”

“We do.”

The sky was covered in thick clouds that made even the midday hour feel dim and gloomy. The three problem maids toiled away under that ashen sky, following their superior’s instructions, covered in rain gear.

The hooded clothing made of aquatic drake leather did the bare minimum to keep water from directly hitting their heads and bodies, but working out in the rain like they were made it less than effective. In fact, Emilia had already spoken with Orajā—the maid in charge of the baths—to have the baths ready, along with complete changes of clothes.

While Capua was still warm even during the rainy season, working in the driving rain without properly taking care of yourself afterwards could certainly lead to illness. Besides, this job was one where you would inevitably be soaked to the skin regardless.

All that aside, once they actually started work, the problem maids were fairly efficient.

“The electricity supply has stopped, right?” Dolores asked. “In which case, cut off the flow through the hose.”

“Got it,” Faye answered. “We’re only doing simple maintenance this time, so we don’t have to clean the hose as well, right? We just need to clean the tank once the water’s stopped along with unclogging the drain.”

“Ah! Watch out, Faye. You can’t just put your hand in the tank like that, there’ll definitely be things inside.”

The small water generator’s maintenance during the rainy season had—for the first season after its installation—been something Zenjirou had done personally, standing out in the rain himself. Now, though, the maids could do it on their own.

Zenjirou hadn’t been very well-informed on how to maintain it anyway. He had shown them the recordings from the first installation near his old home and given what explanation he could, so the maids were just as capable as him.

Broadly speaking, the generator he'd brought consisted of three parts: the tank, the generator, and the control system. The control system was installed in the living room and wasn't impacted by the rain. The generator was not easily maintained, so the maids were working on the tank.

They stopped the generation and water inflow and then set about cleaning the tank. The first step was scooping out the contaminated water with buckets. It was a very primitive method, but the tank had no removable drainage port in the bottom, so there was no choice.

With the trio's strength, they wouldn't be able to easily tip the full tank over, so they had to use the buckets to empty it to a point where they *could* manhandle it.

"It makes it feel so fruitless when I see the rain going right back into the tank as we're trying to empty it," Dolores complained with a pinched look.

"Seconded," Faye added with a similar expression.

The way they let the professionalism drop like this was exactly what had earned them their moniker in the first place. However, what they were doing today might well have garnered similar reactions even from the other more serious maids. The one saving grace was that their surroundings were already saturated with water, so they could just dump out the buckets wherever.

"Ugh, it's almost all mud. Oh, Dolores, you have some on your face," Letti said after emptying her bucket. Her prominent chest was easily visible even through the rain gear. The water in the tank would usually be crystal clear. Right now, though, there was enough silt floating in it that they could only see through about five centimeters.

The water source was a small river that flowed in from outside the castle. The increase in rain had raised its level, so the extra water had carried mud away from the banks.

The maid in question didn't even bother to wipe her face with a sleeve when it was pointed out. She just shook her head. "I'll deal with it later."

They were going to be working with the muddy water for quite some time, so if they started wiping off anything that splashed them, they'd never finish. It

was a sensible decision, but perhaps slightly unmaidly for a maid of the inner palace—expected to always be clean as they were.

Whatever the case, the methodical cleaning soon began to bear fruit. While the tank was still getting water added to it by the rain, three people emptying it with buckets was slowly making the water level drop.

“We can probably tip the tank now,” Emilia commented from where she’d been supervising. “Make sure you don’t go too far and tip it over entirely.” Naturally, she took the initiative and put her hands on the edge to help.

“Slowly, slowly, be careful...”

“Ugh, so heavy...”

“Gnuhh...”

The four maids working together managed to get the tank on its side without any real issue.

Doing so, of course, disgorged the muddy water all over the grass. However, there was a thick layer of silt and gravel at the bottom, so just tipping the tank wouldn’t empty it entirely. There was more mud and gravel than it had first seemed.

Anything other than water making it to the generator could damage it. The gravel could cause physical damage inside, while the mud could cause the turbine to seize if it got packed around the axle.

The tank was there to stop that from happening. The water from the river was first collected in the tank, which allowed any sediment to settle out. It kept the generator safe, but when the original water quality dropped as it had now, it wasn’t enough. Thus, the entire tank needed to be emptied and cleaned.

“Right, I’ll scrape it out,” Faye said, taking a small shovel and starting to haul out the dirt.

“Be careful, Faye,” Dolores warned her again. “There has to be something in there.” She didn’t make a move to get closer to the mud, let alone help her colleague. Instead, she left, going to get fresh water to give the tank a final cleaning.

For her part, Faye wasn't even slightly hesitant. If anything, her eyes were sparkling as she set about her task.

"I know," she said. "Oh! There is!"

A small creature leaped from the mud she'd removed. The waterways into the castle had several metal meshes across them to stop the bigger, dangerous aquatic animals from getting in, but creatures smaller than the gaps could obviously slide past. Such creatures came in with greater frequency when the water was higher and more contaminated.

"Lady Emilia, can I deal with this?!"

Even understanding Faye's intent as the younger girl's dark eyes sparkled, Emilia's face of professionalism never wavered as she nodded.

"You may. Maintaining food reserves while under siege is another role for a martial family's daughters after all. However, you may *not* allow your work here to suffer."

"Right!" Faye replied energetically.

She quickly pulled an empty bucket to her side and grabbed the creature in a flash, tossing it in. With the rain as heavy as it was, even creatures that could only live in water would not immediately dry up. The water gathering at the bottom of the bucket would keep it alive until it was time.

"That was a pretty big haul," she commented when she was done transferring the creatures from the mud to the bucket.

"Wow, there are so many," Letti said quietly, honestly impressed as she watched from the side.

Small fish, shellfish, frogs, and even a crocodile-like creature that seemed to have just hatched. Most of them looked somewhat disgusting but would be rather delicious if they were cleaned and cooked properly.

Emilia sighed at the crocodile. "We will need to call the gardeners and—just in case—the soldiers on the next clear day to go over the reservoirs and fountains. Martial household or not, this is not a woman's job."

This creature wouldn't be the only one of its kind that had gotten in, and the

fact that one had managed to grow without notice could be a serious matter.

She sighed once again.



Once they were done working in the rain, the three problem maids immediately headed for the baths.

As expected, their outfits were soaked through, even their underwear. After they managed to strip the clinging cloth from their figures, the three went straight into the warm water.

“Ahhh! On days like *this*, there’s nothing better than a hot bath!” Faye exclaimed.

“Faye! Don’t just get straight in the bath! We’re covered in mud.”

“I know.”

The three scooped up water from the bath and washed their faces, bodies, and then heads.

“Abababababa!” Faye yelled, shaking off the water she’d just tipped over her head. While she usually preferred cold baths and disliked the heat, she’d accept nothing else on days like this.

The rainy season’s deluge had chilled her to the bone, so the gentle heat from the baths was pleasant. It was hard to get their hair and bodies clean of the muddy water, but the inner palace was furnished with perfumed liquid soap and shampoo that Zenjirou had made. The three painstakingly washed off all the dirt and then sank to their chins in the hot water. By the time they left the room, they were much more lively again.

Being assigned to the gardens, the three had no responsibilities other than temporary cover once they were done.

“Ahhh, I’m alive again,” Faye groaned.

“You shouldn’t loll around like that. It *is* good, though,” Dolores scolded her.

“Well, we’re parched,” Letti chuckled.

The trio had taken the pitcher of fruit juice—which was meant for them—

from the fridge and were relaxing as they drank it in the waiting room. While they were slightly “lolling,” the room was effectively behind the scenes, a room only the maids would ever enter.

With the job being both live-in and lasting for several years, if they didn’t take time like this to relax, they wouldn’t be able to bear it. Therefore, when they heard the door start to open, they didn’t sit up properly, simply staying slumped in their seats as they looked over.

The people at the door were a trio of girls even younger than them.

“Oh, the new girls?”

“You’re Mirella, Louisa, and Nilda, right?”

“Ah, are you observing today?”

The three newcomers looked surprised at being addressed but soon started to smile as they came over.

“We are,” answered Mirella for the three of them. “The Head Maid said we were to watch our seniors and learn for now.” The girl had long, glossy black hair. Her eyes were half-lidded in an agreeable look.

While the custom in the inner palace was to not use their family names, it was still easy to pick out a girl from a high-ranking family from her graceful movements.

“We will do our utmost to stay out of your way, so please instruct and command us as you need.”

Louisa was the next to speak, her voice hard and movements almost mechanical. She had slightly curled, dark hair and eyes of a similar shade. Coupled with her dark skin, you could say she looked like almost any other Capuan.

However, with the way she kept her center of gravity steady and almost glided as she walked, she stood out among the maids a little. You could describe both of them as having good posture, but the implication was slightly different for Louisa than it was for Mirella. This wasn’t in reference to her manners, but more physically keeping her body completely under control to give the

impression of a good posture. To put it bluntly, she carried herself more like a knight than a maid.

“Glad to meet you,” said the final girl—Nilda—energetically. She had much the same build as Faye, with her black hair gathered in a short ponytail. She seemed exceptionally friendly, as her dark eyes shone with simple happiness at the people in the room.



Faye and Dolores got chairs out for the new arrivals while Letti poured three more wooden cups for them.

“Our work is already done for today, but you can relax for a while since you’re here,” Dolores told them as she was pulling the chair out.

“Uhm...are you sure we should?”

“We were told to watch, and it is working hours.”

“Thank you very much.”

Mirella was confused, Louisa remained expressionless, and Nilda sat down with a smile. It went without saying that Mirella’s reaction was the closest to normal. Louisa’s reaction was slightly abnormal, and even Dolores had never seen someone react like Nilda.

Regardless, if they were here for training, relaxing with them could be argued to be part of their job.

“It’s okay, taking a break like this is actually part of it,” Dolores explained. “I guarantee that the head maid won’t scold you for sitting down for a drink. You should stay with us for a while to get used to how things are here.”

“Then I shall accept your kindness,” Mirella answered.

“Excuse me,” Louisa added as she took her own seat.

The first thing the newbies wanted to hear about was nothing other than the work in the inner palace.

“You have to work outside in this rain?!” Mirella shouted in shock.

For some reason, it made Faye give a proud look with her answer. “That’s right. It’s really hard on us. Well, you’ll need to be ready for it as well.”

“If that is to be my duty, then I shall not refuse,” Louisa said. She was the only one to react so decisively.

Nilda’s already wide eyes had widened even further with surprise, and Mirella looked uneasy. The latter’s reaction let them pick up at a glance that she was highborn. Never mind working in the rain, she likely had never even been outside in it apart from in a roofed carriage.

“There are benefits to it, though,” Faye added. “You can take the animals in the tank. You usually only get fish and shellfish, but today there were frogs, snakes, and even a baby crocodile.”

Mirella looked like she was only barely holding on to consciousness. “Snakes...and crocodiles? W-Will we have to deal with them?”

“Have you never done that kind of thing before?” Nilda asked, puzzled.

“Snakes and crocodiles aside, we will need to be able to deal with fish and shellfish. One of the maids’ roles is cooking in the kitchen,” Louisa added dispassionately.

Mirella couldn’t hide how at sea she felt. “Nilda, Louisa, are you not concerned about that? We’ll...uh, have to touch those kinds of animals and kill them.”

Being from the type of family she was, Mirella hadn’t seen fish or shellfish outside of the meals containing them. If she’d seen a river snake or crocodile—even if they were small—she’d be more likely to jump and scream.

“I grew up in a village, so I caught those kinds of things in the rivers when I was small,” Nilda explained.

“You too?” Louisa asked. “I’m a commoner as well, so I grew up around all that.”

Even the problem maids looked askance at the new maids so easily revealing their upbringing. Their—relatively—sensible member was the one to speak for the older maids.

“Nilda, Louisa, family names aren’t used in the inner palace, so you shouldn’t talk about the circumstances of your birth so openly. At least for now, okay?”

In truth, noble society was as constrained as it was wide-ranging, so most new arrivals knew at least one or two of their fellow maids before they came. Even if no one knew them, with enough general knowledge, a name and age was enough to narrow people down without much issue. Therefore, everyone would know where everyone else had come from within a month.

After that happened, conversations involving lineage wouldn’t cause an issue

if they came up, but it was something that was better to let happen naturally. It was not something they should explicitly reveal of their own accord.

Of course, for people from common backgrounds, like Ines, Margarete, and Louisa, all people would know would be that they were “commoners.”

“I’m sorry, I’ll take more care.”

“I understand; thank you for your warning.”

Both Nilda and Louisa gave a nod of thanks in response.



Several days later, the three problem maids were in the kitchen at night. They weren’t yet on the rotation for it, so it wasn’t work. Besides, dinner had long since passed. The trio was there for much more selfish reasons.

They’d gotten permission from the head of the kitchen—Vanessa—so the stove was still burning merrily. Faye used the light from the flames to ferret out three buckets. She took the lids off and then smiled widely.

“Yup, most of them are still alive. Letti, I’ll prep them; you cook.”

“Okay, Faye, I’ll do my best.”

“You’re both bizarre. You’re touching them like it’s nothing,” Dolores said, frowning at the contents. The contents in question were the aquatic creatures Faye had caught while they were cleaning the water tank the other day. The fish and shellfish were one thing, but Dolores frowning at the water snakes, frogs, and the crocodile was perhaps a more typical reaction.

The well supplying the kitchen came from a completely different water source, underneath the bedrock, so it didn’t worsen during the rainy season. Faye had drawn from it over several days, changing the water the creatures were in until the sediment was gone along with most of the stench. Now, she said they were ready to eat.

“But you prepare fish and drake meat when we’re on cooking duty,” Faye said in confusion even as she plucked a frog out of the bucket. With no hesitation at all, she brought the pick in her other hand down with a thud.

Dolores couldn’t look directly at the frog as it twitched despite being pinned

to the chopping board, but neither could she look away.

“Unfortunately, I was brought up in the city,” she frowned. “To us, drake meat is more of a background ingredient, and I’m used to fish and shellfish. Frogs and crocodiles are completely different.”

“I was brought up in the city too, though,” Faye objected while splitting the frog’s skin down its stomach.

Dolores let out a put-upon sigh. “And that’s why you’re strange. We are noble daughters from the capital, we have a long and honorable history, why should we—” Dolores’s complaints were interrupted by the exceedingly rare sound of a scream from Letti.

“Letti?” Faye asked.

“Faye, look! What do we do? The crocodile’s...”

They didn’t need to look where she was pointing to understand what had happened.

The small crocodile had managed to escape and was pattering across the stone floor of the kitchen.

“Damn!”

“Faye! This isn’t funny!”

“I know!”

As the emergency unfolded, both of their expressions changed. Palm-sized though it was, the creature was still a crocodile. If it got into the royal living space, it would be no laughing matter. The three of them chased after it with ashen faces.

Fortunately, the crocodile was unable to really get moving on the land. The issue wasn’t its speed, but the time of night. The fire from the stove didn’t illuminate the whole kitchen, so finding the creature again if it managed to hide in the shadows would be difficult. The situation had gone in the worst possible direction.

“It went that way!”

“What? That’s towards the corridor!”

It went without saying that there was no lighting out in the corridor. They wouldn’t stand much chance of catching it even if they rushed after it.

“What do we do?!” Letti fretted before brightening. “Oh, I know.” She took a piece of firewood from the stove and used it as a torch as she stepped out into the corridor.

The corridor from the kitchen was a single straight path without anywhere to hide. Still, it was no mean feat to find the crocodile by the torchlight alone.

Surprisingly, though, Letti’s torch didn’t reveal a crocodile, but rather a girl. Letti let out a shriek as the torchlight cast menacing shadows over the girl’s face. She was expressionless, with the crocodile dangling from one hand. The darkness made it a slightly scary sight, but once Letti calmed down, she realized it was just one of the new maids.

“Oh! Louisa?”

“You caught it?”

“Phew, you really saved us. Why are you here, though?”

Louisa didn’t react to the trio bustling around her.

“I decided to get some water before going to sleep and came to the kitchen. Then I found this crocodile and caught it.” There was no boasting in her words as she lifted the dangling crocodile up.

“Wow! You caught it in the dark?” Faye asked.

“I am well trained.”

“Actually, I’m even more impressed that you’re not bothered by how creepy that thing is. You just plucked it up.”

“I am well trained,” Louisa repeated.

The maids went back into the kitchen in the midst of an excitable conversation. Faye went straight to the buckets and checked them.

“Great, no problems here,” she said.

The river snakes could also have escaped, but they were all swimming slowly

through the water.

“I thought my heart was about to stop,” Faye complained.

“We need to thank Louisa,” Dolores pointed out.

“Right, thanks, Louisa.”

“Not at all; it’s my job.”

The trio went straight back to what they were doing.

“Let’s deal with this little one before he decides to escape again. Thanks, Louisa.”

Louisa spoke dispassionately as Faye went to rectify her earlier mistake. “If you do not mind, I can do it,” she suggested.

“Oh, you can? I guess that’s fine. You can eat with us as thanks. Letti’s the best chef in the inner palace after Lady Vanessa.”

“Thank you, I will look forward to it. I will just borrow these tools.”

Faye and Louisa used the arrayed knives to prepare the frogs, crocodile, and snakes that were left. Louisa seemed entirely familiar with the knives, so there was no danger at all.

While they were doing all that, Letti had a deep pot with some oil heating as she readied her seasonings. Deep frying things used a lot of oil, so it was something she could rarely make at home, but that didn’t hold true in the inner palace. Royals never spared the oil in cooking to begin with, and the oil they used was the best of the best. Therefore, once the oil had been used several times, or enough time had passed that it started to lose its flavor, Vanessa allowed the younger maids to use it to learn.

“I’ll deal with these,” Dolores said, beginning to prepare the fish and shellfish.

While she wanted to avoid touching the other animals, these particular creatures didn’t present any issue for her. The only real difference was how familiar she was with them. She gutted and decapitated the relatively large fish. The shellfish she simply removed from the shells. She couldn’t do anything with the smaller fish and shellfish, so she left them as they were. Either way, they were being deep-fried, so if they were properly cooked, the bones and shells

would be edible as well.

Once the preparations were complete, it was a one-woman show on Letti's part.

"Done, Letti," Dolores told her.

"Me too," Faye added.

"I am finished," Louisa reported.

Letti stayed in front of the stove as she answered.

"Thanks. I'll do the rest, so bring them here."

"Got it. We'll let you get on with it."

"Make sure it's tasty, please."

"I feel bad leaving it all to you, so we'll make some tea," Dolores decided.

Two of the trio left the cooking to Letti and went to the well to get water to wash their hands.

"The only thing you're good for is making tea, Dolores," Faye said as they did so, before turning to give Louisa a suggestion. "You may as well fetch your roommates too."

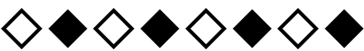
"That's a nice idea, coming from you," Dolores told her.

"My roommates? You mean Mirella and Nilda? Why?" Louisa asked in confusion.

Faye played the role of her senior and offered an explanation.

"To build a good relationship with them. You room and sleep together, along with working and generally living with each other, so I think it's a good idea to make sure you get along well by doing these kinds of things."

"I see. It makes sense to increase coordination with my colleagues to complete my duties. Thank you for your advice," the younger girl said before immediately heading for her room to put the advice into practice.



Thirty minutes later, five maids were around the table in the kitchen: Faye,

Dolores, Letti, Louisa, and Nilda. There was a wooden cup filled with steaming hot tea in front of each of them and a wooden plate in the middle of the table with a mound of freshly fried food. The contents of the plate were steaming as well.

“Oh? Where’s Mirella?” Faye asked.

“Mirella was tired, so she decided to abstain for today,” Louisa answered dully.

“Oh, right. I guess it is late.”

While Faye accepted it without any question whatsoever, the truth of the matter was a little different. Mirella had been on board when she first heard about the late-night meal, but when she was told what the food was, she’d suddenly said she was tired and would stay in. The snakes and crocodile were just a little too much for someone of her good, ladylike upbringing.

Neither Louisa nor Nilda had been able to infer that, though, and wet their throats with the warm tea before bringing the freshly fried fish and shellfish to their mouths. The base seasoning was salt, with other spices in separate bowls along with a fresh sauce. They could add whatever combination they wished before eating.

“Mm, that is delicious,” Louisa commented frankly, a look of surprise visible on her face for once. She had used some of the sauce on the crocodile meat.

“Thanks, I’m glad you think so,” Letti said with a soft smile.

Faye looked even prouder as she puffed up her chest. “Letti’s cooking is incredible, right? She made the sauce from scratch as well.”

“Really?”

“That’s amazing, Letti.”

Louisa was once more clearly shocked, and Nilda offered straightforward praise.

The sauce was the result of simmering various vegetable and meat scraps in seasonings for hours. It was practically the most important part of determining what the meal would taste like. In fact, Vanessa was generally the only one who

dealt with the sauce. Most of the younger maids only helped with simple labor, but Letti was the one exception.

Considering she was allowed to make the sauce herself when she had the time, and Vanessa sometimes taste-tested it, you could say that Letti was already her apprentice in some respects.

Regardless of the ingredients' origins, the young maids snacked on the exceptionally tasty fried food as they chatted.

"How are you both?" Dolores asked casually. "Are you used to the inner palace now?"

The two junior maids nodded.

"Everyone is so kind, and I'm enjoying myself," Nilda answered.

"I am. There have been no impediments to my duties as of yet."

While both of them had said very different things, there was the commonality that both of them had adapted to their current circumstances. On the other hand, Mirella had more difficulties with her higher birth. Given her upbringing, she didn't even have the experience of living with other people as she was doing now. While she might have been proficient as a maid, and her roommates were not exactly bizarre, sleeping in the same room as other people could itself be a significant source of stress.

"You'll be starting work for real soon. Is there anything you're worried about?" Faye asked, leaning forward to offer advice if they wanted it. She was the very image of trying desperately to make a good impression on her juniors, although in some ways, she was the last person you would want to rely on.

However, Nilda just smiled pleasantly. "Um, I think I will be fine with the cooking and cleaning, but the etiquette worries me," she admitted.

Faye seemed to have not expected that and frowned. "Etiquette? Hmm, Sir Zenjirou is really easygoing on that front, so I don't think you need to worry. Although, you should probably be a bit more careful in front of Her Highness."

Faye was completely incapable of understanding the younger girl's concern. She was the ringleader of the problem maids, but she still knew the manners

she needed as a noble. It was because she knew them so intimately that she straddled the line of angering people and not, to her own benefit.

However, Nilda wanted to follow etiquette but didn't know it well enough in the first place. Coupled with her village upbringing, she might sometimes do things completely unthinkable from a noble's perspective.

Faye was less likely to follow what she knew, but Nilda was more likely to make a significant mistake.

Dolores stepped up after Faye's somewhat insubstantial reply. She was far and away the most wily of them.

"If you make a mistake, the most important thing is to explain that it wasn't intentional and to honestly apologize. If you remember those two things, Sir Zenjirou is far from unapproachable, so I think you can relax."

Dolores knew how to react to things and had the most insight, so she had the clearest impression of how things worked in the inner palace. Zenjirou himself was a rather meek person and had never once raised his voice at them, so few of the maids really realized it, but his word was practically law in the inner palace.

Amanda was a harsh boss, and Aura was a significantly less personable boss than Zenjirou. However, Amanda and Aura both would not forcibly overrule Zenjirou if he said not to punish someone too harshly. In effect, as long as the maids didn't earn his ire, the inner palace was a harmonious place to live.

"Um...Dolores, I would rather learn how not to make the mistake than how to smooth it over after the fact."

Dolores looked like she'd just felt the ground give way beneath her as she blinked in surprise. "I never thought of that."

Dolores always put her efforts into making sure that her cutting corners wouldn't cause any anger—or that she would suffer as little as possible if it did. In that sense, she was the sharpest of the three in a rather bad way. Nilda's earnest desire to not make the mistakes to begin with was somewhat dazzling to her.

"Ah, right. In that case, I think your only option is to make the mistakes and

learn from them. The only visitor we usually get is Lady Octavia, and Sir Zenjirou is forgiving for honest mistakes, so you can do it over and over until you learn.”

“I see. That makes sense. I’ll do my best!” Nilda nodded firmly and clenched her fists in response to Dolores’s somewhat bewildering answer.

They continued talking for some time after that.

“Right, we were only doing basic maintenance,” Faye explained. “The full version is all of the maids together after the rainy season ends. It’s super difficult, so both of you should get ready for it.”

Nilda shuddered, while Louisa just nodded.

“I-I’ll do my best.”

“It is only natural for work to be difficult. I am ready for it.”

“I appreciate the enthusiasm, but it’s probably harder than you are thinking, so you need to be even more ready for it.” Dolores was cheerful as she spoke.

The all-hands-on-deck nature of the full maintenance cycle after the rainy season meant that she wouldn’t be able to escape it either, but the despair of the new girls was more important to her. She was perhaps not the kindest of souls.

“There are more of us now that you’ve all joined, though, so that will help,” Letti added in her usual lilting tone. While she had spoken fairly thoughtlessly, what she said was still correct.

“True; more people means each person has an easier time of it,” Dolores said.

“What happens when the new group is working officially, though?” Faye mused as she considered the current rotation.

“Hmm, maybe there will be more of us in each place?” Nilda suggested.

“Perhaps we will act as a reserve force when required,” was Louisa’s suggestion.

Of course, both were just guesses. Zenjirou’s idea was actually neither of those things. He had suggested that the greater numbers could be used to give the maids periodic holidays.

Of course, they would still not be allowed to leave the inner palace, but the plan was for them to have a whole day to themselves to relax.

Then again, the head maid could call them back at her discretion and cancel said holiday, so Louisa's suggestion that they were a reserve force was not entirely off the mark. With that said, set holidays were a new concept, and it would take some time to spread through the inner palace.

"Whoops, it's about time we pack it up," Dolores remarked. "Let's get everything tidied."

The group stopped their conversation and stood.

"Got it. I'll put out the stove," Letti offered.

"Right, then I'll clean up the buckets," Faye added.

"I'll wipe the table down. Nilda, Louisa, can you wash the crockery?" Dolores asked, nonchalantly taking the easiest job and pushing the washing up onto her two juniors.

"Right."

"Understood. I shall begin immediately."

Whether the two realized her aim or not, they obediently gathered everything up and took it to be washed.

THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE

8

Illustrator:
**Jyuu
Ayakura**

Author:
**Tsunehiko
Watanabe**

**“Hell yeah!
I did it!”**

Zenjirou let out
a cry of joy.



“Perhaps you cannot
see my clothes thanks
to the rainwear?”

“My apologies, captain.”

Princess Freya
and her guard,
Skaji, were
standing within
the port city of
Valentia as rain
lashed down
over it.

THE
IDEAL
SPONGER
LIFE ⑧





“Our
second...
might be
on its
way.”

Her awkward
tone coupled
with the way
she was
avoiding his
gaze gave
him a bad
feeling.

“I am
Lucretia,
and I
offer you
greetings
from the
Broglie
family
as their
representative.”

The girl
lifted her
skirt in a
curtsy.



**“Your Majesty, will
you welcome me when
that time comes?”**

Zenjirou's expression tightened at the princess's question. He didn't have many options here.

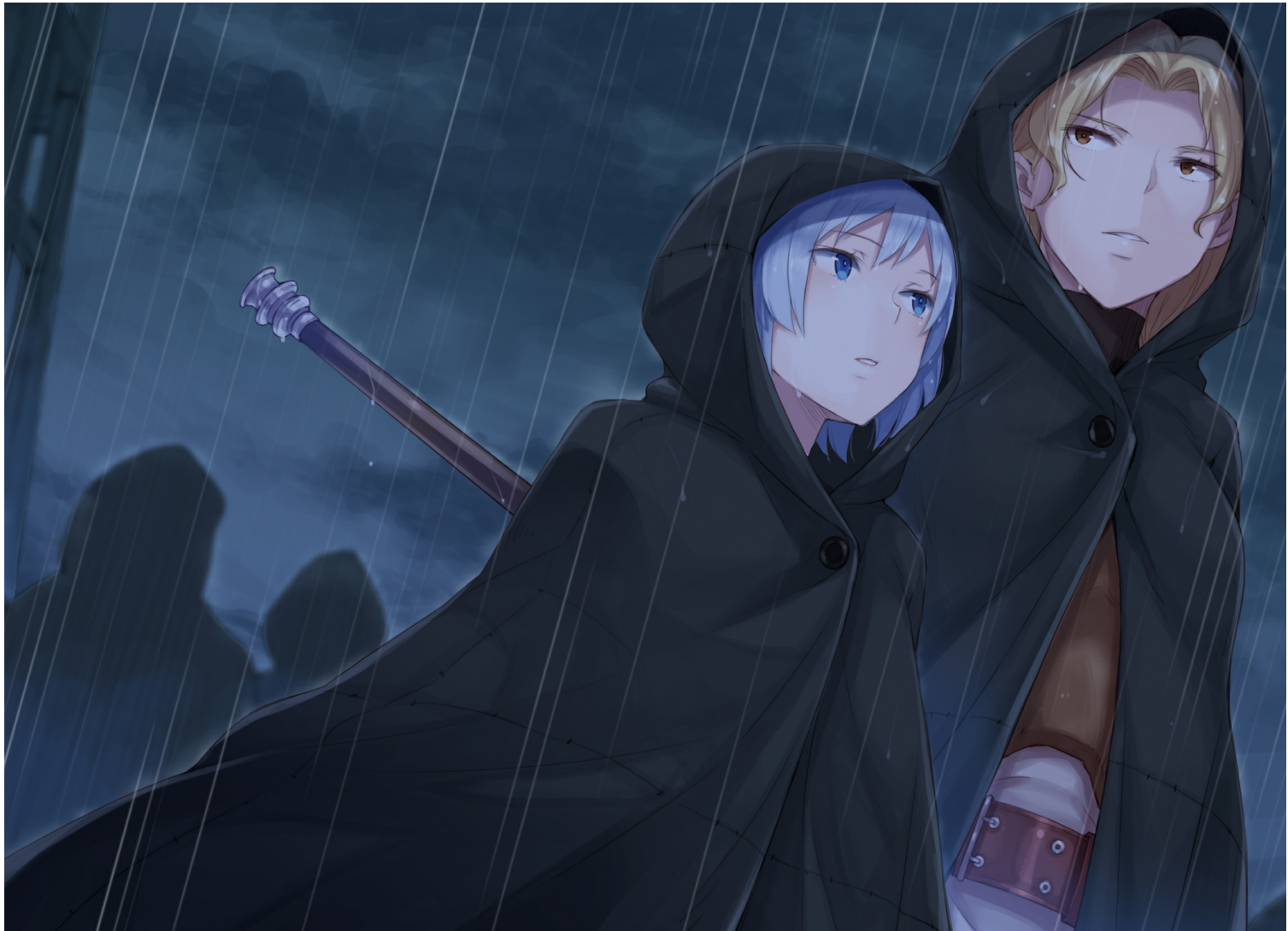
**“Of course,
Princess
Freya.”**

A wide smile found its way to the princess's misty-eyed face.

THE
IDEAL
SPONGER
LIFE ⑧















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The Ideal Sponger Life: Volume 8

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RISOU NO HIMOSEIKATSU

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Originally published in Japan by Shufunotomo Infos Co., Ltd.

Through Shufunotomo Co., Ltd.

Translation rights arranged with Shufunotomo Co., Ltd.

English translation © 2022 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: September 2022

