
Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for my Retirement
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COLETTE
The girl who saved Mitsuha.


I'll save up those 80,000 gold coins
and have a peaceful and happy retirement!
MITSUHA YAMANO
A girl who accidentally ends up in another world. She can jump between Earth and that world at will, and decides to use this power to become rich.


"It's the stuff you ordered. First up, the decorative short sword. This thing's new, not an antique. Antiques are fragile and blow a hole in your wallet. It comes with a sheath, so just tuck it in your belt. It won't be much good in a fight, but since you'll be usin' your guns, you ain't gonna need it."
Mm, looks about right for me. I shouldn't have a problem holding it, anyway.

CONTENTS

Images

Chapter 1: Mitsuha Goes to Another World

Chapter 2: The Beast Must Die

Chapter 3: The Kingdom of Ambition

Chapter 4: Preparation

Chapter 5: If the Pearls are a Weapon, Mitsuha is a WMD!

Chapter 6: A Place to Call My Own

Chapter 7: Mitsuha’s General Store

Chapter 8: Debutante

Chapter 9: Adventurers

Extra: Easy Money

Afterword

Copyright

CHAPTER 1: MITSUHA GOES TO ANOTHER WORLD THE GIRL STOOD ATOP A STEEP CLIFF, HER HANDS RESTING ON THE WEATHERED WOODEN RAILING THAT SEPARATED HER FROM THE DEPTHS BELOW. HER GAZE WAS CAST OVER THE DISTANT HORIZON. OH, BUT DON'T WORRY—SUICIDE WAS THE LAST THING ON HER MIND.

Her name was Mitsuha Yamano. Her straight, shoulder-length black hair framed a youthful face without a hint of makeup. Standing at merely four foot eleven, the eighteen-year-old was often mistaken for a child in middle school or, even more offensively, elementary school.

Six months ago, Mitsuha had lost her beloved family—her mother, father, and older brother—to a freak accident, leaving her without any close relatives. She had some distant ones, sure, but you could count the times they'd met on one hand, and it was likely they would never meet again.

Following the funeral and other relevant matters, Mitsuha had been left with a hefty sum of inheritance and insurance money, and along with it, no shortage of enemies. A particularly greedy uncle and his wife sought to wrest the money from her with cruel words and intimidation. A couple of undesirables from Mitsuha's school even loitered outside her home to try to squeeze out

whatever they could. By the time Mitsuha was able to drive away everyone pursuing her wealth, the mental burden had led to her failing her college entrance exams.

Losing her entire family would have been bad enough on its own, but Mitsuha's brother—two years older than her—had been her idol, so she felt his loss the most. The hurt, the stress that had come with handling the aftermath, and the profound dejection that followed had made it far too difficult for her to focus on her studies. By now, at least, she had mostly recovered from the pain of flunking her exams.

Craving a change of pace, she'd decided to visit a local tourist destination. Actually, to call it such might've been too generous—the "lookout", as it was known, was little more than the tip of a jagged coastline. A smattering of modest conveniences, such as wooden fences, coin-operated binoculars, and public toilets, decorated the area. But Mitsuha didn't need anything more. All she wanted was to stare out at the sea and enjoy its tranquility.

On such an unremarkable weekday afternoon, the only other visitors to the site were a college-aged couple, a pair of elderly spouses, and a trio of thick-headed hoodlums whose intelligence rivaled the rocks below. Mitsuha, on the other hand, had the academic potential to enter any of countless colleges across the country. Unfortunately, only one was within commuting distance of the home her parents had left her, and its standards of entry were extremely high. Perhaps she could have met them if she'd been able to perform her best, but this feat had proved too much for her in her dire state.

Originally, Mitsuha had nothing against attending a college away from home, but now that she was alone, she didn't want to leave her parents' house. They had built it from the ground up, and with the absence of her family members, the memories they'd left behind were too precious for her to let go. It was this attachment that influenced Mitsuha's choice to take only the entrance exams for her local college.

Oh, man... What do I do now? Mitsuha contemplated whether she should give the exams a try again next year or focus on securing an income instead. The remaining mortgage on the Yamano home had been paid off when her father died, and her parents' life insurance payout had made her pretty wealthy. Four

years' worth of college and living expenses, however, would tap heavily into this supply.

For this reason, Mitsuha weighed the option of entering the workforce right away. While she wouldn't make as high of a salary as she might with a college degree, there weren't any companies within commuting distance that were all that generous in the first place. Furthermore, a degree hardly guaranteed a well-paying job in this day and age.

Mitsuha also considered the possibility that she might marry and have children in the future. It would be hard enough to juggle a family and a full-time job; the debt from college would only make things worse. All things considered, college just didn't seem worth it when the other, more viable option was to start working and saving.

It's not like I have a dream job or anything, she thought, staring out at the beautiful sea.

"Well now, who do we have here? You skippin' school, little lady?" An oily voice from behind derailed her train of thought. Mitsuha turned and found herself cornered by three sinister grins. The delinquent who'd spoken had bleached hair and looked to be about twenty. "Wanna hang with us? We'll show you a good time, take you somewhere nice, getcha somethin' to eat... then see where it goes from there, huh?"

Here we go again. They clearly think I'm some kid cutting class, Mitsuha thought, thoroughly unamused. While many women enjoyed appearing younger than they were, Mitsuha was an adult and thus found no joy in being treated like a middle schooler. Then again, revealing that she was actually eighteen would only make them more assertive, so she chose to keep this fact to herself.

But did it really matter? The group of men before her was trying to pick up a girl they assumed to be in middle school; maybe they wouldn't have cared one bit about her age. While Mitsuha's opinion of these skirt-chasers was low to begin with, she didn't want to accept an even more unsavory alternative: that they would actually go after an elementary schooler.

Regardless, they weren't people she wanted to deal with, but it would be a

tough situation to escape. The three leering delinquents blocked her way forward, and only a plunge to her death awaited behind her. Trapped against the wooden fence, she had no advantage to use beyond her wits.

Putting on the youngest-sounding voice she could muster, she piped, “Sorry, mister... I can’t go with you. Mommy and Daddy are coming to pick me up!”

Mitsuha hoped the act would convince them that she truly was just a child waiting for her parents—a target way outside the acceptable range of these hoodlums. Against her wishes, however, the blond scanned the perimeter to confirm the absence of her parents.

He then marched forward, grabbed her by the arm, and growled, “Just come with us!” His sidekicks also advanced, sending Mitsuha into a panic. She glanced around, desperate for one of the passersby to lend a hand, but they were all making a valiant effort to see nothing.

Go figure, no one wants to be a hero. Guess I’ve got no choice. I’ll deal with them myself!

Despite her pint-sized frame and cherubic looks, Mitsuha’s intelligence and physical strength were nothing to laugh at. And above all else, Mitsuha had guts. It was this quality that had enabled her to protect her inheritance from those looking to seize it.

Her body moved before she could think, sending an upward kick directly into the blond guy’s groin. Without so much as a peep, he buckled to his knees, writhing in pain. Froth bubbled at the corners of his lips, and he quickly collapsed, lying immobile between his comrades.

“THE HELL’RE YOU DOIN’, YOU BITCH?!” The textbook gangster line erupted from one of the remaining delinquents, and in his rage, he shoved Mitsuha backward with full force.

“Ah...!” she gasped as her back made contact with the wooden fence and an ominous crack reached her ears. Next thing she knew, she found herself in midair, at the mercy of gravity.

Huuuhhh?!

“AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Falling! I'm falling! I'M FALLING! I'M FAAALLLIIINNNG! I don't wanna die! I don't wanna die! I DON'T WANNA DIE!

While screaming at the top of her lungs, Mitsuha prayed from the bottom of her heart for someone to help her.

I DON'T WANNA DIE! I DON'T WANNA DIE!

"WAAAAAAAAGHHH!"

Mitsuha heard a strange cracking sound, accompanied by a scream that wasn't hers, just as her consciousness left her.



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“Where am I?” Mitsuha looked around.

Bark, leaves, grass, lots of trees... Yep, I’m in a forest. Hey, wait, hold on a sec! I totally just fell off a cliff! It was all waves and rocks at the bottom, right?! she thought, bewildered. But far be it from her to complain about this new development. *Waking up in some random forest ain’t great, sure. But it’s way better than turning into a red smear on some rocks!*

With such thoughts in her mind, Mitsuha reflexively stood up and checked her condition. Yes, “reflexively”. Whether it was habit or some sort of adaptation, Mitsuha had been like this for as long as she could remember. In most situations, she prioritized action—thought would come later. She didn’t feel it was entirely normal, but cursory research attempts to label the condition had not been fruitful.

Imagine, for a moment, that there was a ball flying toward you. You’d generally have two choices: dodge or catch. You wouldn’t waste time thinking, *Oh, look, there’s a ball coming. What should I do? Do I catch it? Or dodge it? To the left? Perhaps to the right?*

On the other hand, you would never *reflexively* make a purchase. The way Mitsuha saw it, time was a luxury that allowed careful thought and strategy. In a pinch, you could rely on nothing more than intuition to process the information available to you and choose the best course of action. In her own words, reflexes were the first aid of movement. Such reflexes were generally limited to basic physical movements, but in her case, they seemed to apply to a wider range of actions, though she hadn’t entirely figured out why.

A friend had once told Mitsuha, “You only think about why you do stuff after you do it, don’tcha?” This led to our dear protagonist receiving the nickname “Spex”, short for “Spinal Reflex”.

Take away one letter and it sounds lewd, damn it!

If one truly considered it, the decisions made out of reflex and those that were the product of critical thinking didn’t seem so different. Perhaps all humans had the capacity to think and make decisions in an instant but defaulted to more thorough thought processes to understand *why* they had made them.

Ah, but we've gone off on a tangent now. Time to rein it in and get back to what really matters, shall we?

Okay, I'm not hurt anywhere, and I look pretty much normal. Got my wallet, my house key... But what about the student ID card I've had for three years straight?! Oh, right. I graduated. Mitsuha also checked the large shoulder bag that had fallen along with her and found it still packed with her umbrella, tissues, and a plastic grocery bag. The latter, she felt, was a particularly undervalued item.

After ensuring she had all of her limbs and belongings, Mitsuha checked her surroundings. The forest was relatively dense, and the area she had landed in revealed no signs of human activity. She couldn't see any footpaths or detect people nearby.

Guess I'll walk, she thought, already walking.

Two hours passed, and Mitsuha was rapidly growing exhausted. A scant few rays of light trickled through the canopy overhead, barely enough to illuminate her path. With no idea where she was headed, all Mitsuha could do was walk onward, avoiding any trees and rocks in her way. She felt it entirely possible that she was walking in circles, so she began marking some of the objects she passed. When she didn't encounter them again, she interpreted it as a good sign.

I have to get out of here before it gets dark. Who knows what kind of predators live in these woods? I guess I could sleep in a tree if I had to, but I can totally picture myself rolling over and falling right out of it. I've also gotta find some water... Is there a stream or something nearby? A couple of juicy fruits would work, too.

"Boy, am I tired." Mitsuha had been walking for around four hours. That span of time wouldn't have been so strenuous on a proper, man-made pathway, but she was trudging through the forest's wild undergrowth. Her muscles strained to move forward and her feet throbbed. The sun was also beginning to set, so she decided to climb into the first acceptable tree she encountered and stay the night.

Sure, I probably won't sleep very well, but walking out here overnight is

suicide. My body won't make it, I can't see jack in the dark, and I'd be a sweet little treat for any nighttime hunters lurking around.

In the morning, Mitsuha oozed with fatigue. She had resumed her walk at sunrise, three hours ago, despite being unable to sleep all night. Not only was she terrified of falling out of her chosen tree, but she'd possessed no blanket or anything even remotely helpful to pad out the hard, knotty branches.

"Ah!" She let out a sharp cry upon hearing an unpleasant sound from her left ankle.
Her bodily fatigue and drowsiness had made her absentminded, so she'd made a misstep and twisted her ankle on some roots. *Damn, that hurts,* she cursed internally.

She endured, however, as she had no other choice. To remain in place wouldn't improve her situation, and it wasn't as though she would miraculously heal if she rested. No, she wanted to push herself to keep walking until she found either a settlement or, at the very least, a man-made trail. It wouldn't be an ideal choice for her leg, but it was better than death.

A few more hours came and went. Mitsuha didn't stumble upon any food or water to ease her hunger or thirst, and the pain radiating from her left ankle only became more intense. She had spent so much time thinking about her situation she'd gotten sick of it.

I've got all the time in the world, after all.

Yesterday, she'd only been unconscious for about twenty minutes, maybe half an hour. She had checked the time on her wristwatch the moment she'd woken up. What made this fact peculiar was that, from the cliff where Mitsuha had started, there was no forest of this size you could reasonably get to in such a short amount of time. Furthermore, Mitsuha had fallen off a cliff, so it was improbable for her to have come out unscathed. This led her to three possible conclusions: One: I died, and this is the afterlife.

Two: I'm in a hospital somewhere, in a coma, and this is all a dream.

Three: I got abducted by aliens and taken far, far away... Hey, I'm into my sci-fi too, y'know!

After a brief moment of contemplation, she thought, *I-I'd really like it to be the third one! I'm not a fan of the other two!*

Setting aside the mystery of her arrival, Mitsuha reaffirmed her desire to reach civilization. If she discovered she was still in Japan, she would seek out the police; if not, she would go to the nearest Japanese embassy.

On her third day in the forest, Mitsuha was very, very weary. She had awoken in the afternoon on the first day, and it was still morning, so only about a day and a half's worth of time had passed. Desperate and deprived of food and water, she had taken a gamble by eating some plant leaves. The hunger she could tolerate, but the thirst was defeating her. At this rate, she felt that death was not far behind.

Man, I've had to rest way more than I did yesterday. I'm staggering so bad I feel like I'm tripping on every other rock or root. My arms and legs are covered in bruises, and the pain in my ankle is driving me crazy. Feels like it spread to the rest of my body. Despite it all, she mustered her willpower and kept moving. If she did not, she would die.

Finally, when her sense of time had long since left and her consciousness was growing dim, she came across a path. It spanned just wide enough for one person, so she almost doubted it had been paved by humans.

Please don't tell me it's an animal trail, I'm begging you... The discovery caused her to relax so quickly that, after three days of near-constant motion, her legs gave in at last. She collapsed to the ground and instantly lost consciousness.

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"I don't recognize this ceiling," Mitsuha murmured. Despite her confusion, some small part of her was elated at being able to utter one of the top thirty lines she'd always wanted to say.

Let me think... If I'm not totally bonkers at this point, I just spent days wandering around a forest that should've never been there in the first place, and then passed out as soon as I found a path. Now I'm lying in a stranger's bed, looking at a ceiling I've never seen before.

After setting her thoughts—bizarre as they were—straight, she took in her surroundings. She was in one bedroom of a homely cabin decorated with shabby furniture. Humble as the room may have been, everything appeared to be clean and in order.

Did someone save me? she wondered. Her mind was still hazy, but she was aware of her strongest and most immediate need—sustenance.

"Water! Can someone please give me food and waaater?"

Just after raising her voice, Mitsuha heard hasty footsteps approach from the other side of the door. It swung open, revealing a small girl. She appeared to be no older than ten, with bright blue eyes and a shimmering crop of silver hair. Her dress, while plain, did nothing to diminish her simply adorable countenance. She lit up with a smile, and shouted in a language Mitsuha couldn't understand.

Big bro, I've got a feeling we're not in Japan anymore, Mitsuha thought. *Doesn't seem like I'm in the Anglosphere, either. So maybe I failed my college entrance exams, whatever! I can still tell when somebody's speaking English, as well as a couple other languages.* As the girl chirped her way, Mitsuha quickly ruled out Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean, German, French, and Italian. The girl's exotic appearance was the only clue she had, and it merely told her she was nowhere in Asia.

First, however, there was a more pressing matter to attend to: Mitsuha was starving, and her throat was so dry she could hardly speak. She would take care of her needs first, and communication could come after. After motioning for the girl to stop speaking, she mimed out what she wanted. She cupped her hands, pretending to drink from them, then pointed to her mouth while rubbing her stomach.

There, that oughta do it. Even a monkey would get the message! Uh, maybe I shouldn't make that kinda comparison when this girl probably saved my life.

Still smiling, the girl spoke a few words in response, then turned around and left the room. *Yes! She understood me! I hope...*

But Mitsuha had no reason to worry. After a few minutes, the girl returned with a woman Mitsuha presumed to be her mother, if their matching features

were anything to go by. They brought with them a pitcher of water and two cups, one empty and the other full of some sort of porridge. With a hasty gesture of thanks, Mitsuha took the water and gulped it down.

"Phew! I feel alive again!" She sighed in relief, then turned to her hosts and bowed her head. "Thank you so much for saving me." While they might not have understood her words, Mitsuha felt her body language sufficient to convey her gratitude. The girl's mother appeared shocked for a moment, likely because of the foreign tongue, but her face then eased into a warm smile.

All right, got the thanks outta the way... Now it's chow time! Mitsuha reached for the food. It seemed to be chunks of bread immersed in boiled, diluted milk—bread porridge, so to speak. While the food was simple, it would be nutritious and easy to digest, which was precisely what Mitsuha needed. Going by its warmth and how quickly they'd brought it to her, it was clear they had it prepared for when she woke up.

What a couple of good Samaritans! I'll have to thank them properly when I get back. They saved my life! Mitsuha decided while she ate.

Once she'd been fed, she felt drowsiness overtake her. Her earlier fainting spell and subsequent unconsciousness was far from actual rest. Nourished and relaxed, she closed her eyes once more and finally drifted off into the sleep she deserved.

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"I *do* recognize this ceiling," Mitsuha murmured. Of course, it was the same grainy ceiling she'd seen last time she'd woken up. The biggest difference between then and now was that she felt refreshed.

Just gotta ignore the cuts I've got all over, my twisted ankle, and my overworked thighs and calves. No big deal. Now, how can I make sense of this situation? she pondered.

Mitsuha had found herself in an unsophisticated building adjacent to the massive forest she'd traversed. She had initially assumed the crude building was some sort of mountain hut, but it seemed to be a pretty standard house for the area. This led her to conclude she was in a *very* rural village.

Seems like I've gotta get to a bigger town and contact the embassy. I sure hope they've got phones there.

As she mulled over her thoughts, the door opened, and in walked the silver-haired girl from before. *She probably came to check on me 'cause she* felt *me wake up. This little wood nymph's got some sharp senses!* Upon seeing that Mitsuha was awake, the girl beamed, charged at the bed, and leapt toward her. Her silver-topped head barreled straight into Mitsuha's stomach.

"GUHHH! I GIVE UP! UNCLE, UNCLE!" Mitsuha struggled to break free of the bear hug that followed, which grew dangerously close to snapping her small frame. "MY SPINE! YOU'RE GONNA BREAK MY SPIIINE!" After a few taps on the shoulder, the girl let Mitsuha free from her vise. As Mitsuha fell back into the bed and writhed in pain, her adorable assailant tilted her head in confusion.

So that was just an expression of affection—a local greeting, probably. And it was this intense coming from a little munchkin. An adult would probably crush me! Mitsuha made a mental note to dodge if she sensed incoming danger.

After recovering from the lethal hug, she sat on the bed with the girl and the two began to communicate. Words proved fruitless, of course, but given enough time, Mitsuha felt she could get the information she sought from mere gestures and expressions. It turned out that this girl was the one who had found Mitsuha after she fainted on the path and called for her parents to take her in. The girl then showed Mitsuha around the house, which happened to be empty at present.

Her parents must be out working. Or maybe now that I've woken up, they went to tell someone about me.

The pair had to go outside when Mitsuha expressed a desire to use the bathroom. *Outside, really? Damn, we really are out in the boonies.* She had already deduced that much, but this was far beyond what she'd imagined. There was nothing in the area besides a few other cabins—houses, rather—made of barely processed wooden logs.

If I had to guess where the term "the sticks" came from, this would be it, she mused to herself. *Also, umm, where are all the street lights and utility poles? Oh, I get it, they're keeping the place looking scenic and homey by using*

underground cables, right? Ugh, as if! It looked as though she had to find a way to the nearest town, after all.

After they went back inside, Mitsuha resumed her attempts at communication. The “conversation” was slow and awkward, but she was surprised by how much she was able to learn. It was possible she was missing the mark on some details, but she hoped she wasn’t too far off.

If she’d understood correctly, this girl—Colette was her name—was an only child who lived in this house with just her parents. This village was almost completely self-sufficient, surviving on simple industries like agriculture, forestry, and hunting. And as she’d said before, Colette was the one who’d discovered Mitsuha unconscious on the trail and called for her rescue. After that, Colette had looked after her, wiping her sweat, keeping her hydrated, and…

Wait, so she’s literally my lifesaver! Mitsuha realized, and impulsively pulled the younger girl into a tight hug. Colette giggled a bit and reached out to hug her back. Sensing danger, however, Mitsuha reflexively pushed her away. She had always been quick on the uptake, especially when it was a matter of life and death. As she sat there, feeling somehow victorious, Colette’s shocked expression began to scrunch up with tears.

Oh, no! Mitsuha desperately tried to apologize and put her back in a good mood. Colette eventually forgave her, even if she looked a bit sulky as she did. *Good going, Mitsuha! You really messed up!* she cursed internally. But by the time Colette’s parents returned, she was back to normal. *She’s as much of a child as she looks, huh?*

Now that her parents were home, Mitsuha sought to communicate with them instead. After all, there was only so much one could learn from an eight-year-old girl. Yes, she had been mistaken about Colette’s age; she’d thought the girl to be ten at first, but found out she was two years off. It came as a surprise to her, and she felt the girl was rather mature for someone her age. *That’s my lifesaver for you!*

Unfortunately, Mitsuha’s attempts to pull additional information from Colette’s parents resulted in disappointment. They had apparently been out

working on their farm, not off telling someone about her. It wasn't as though they were villains keeping her captive; they simply hadn't even considered reporting her to the authorities.

Either way, Mitsuha was more than grateful for the food and hospitality they had provided. In worse company, she could've been sold to human traffickers and handled like a slave. All things considered, she felt her hosts were good people, and they had treated her favorably. What really disappointed her, though, was that she didn't learn any more from them than she had from their daughter.

While there was the language barrier to consider, Mitsuha had advanced her methods from gesturing to drawing pictures. Yet all she learned in the end was that the couple's intelligence was likely on the same level as Colette's. Was the girl some sort of prodigy, or were her parents a bit unfortunate in that regard?

Mitsuha had drawn a simple world map and tried asking them to point out their location, but it appeared as though they couldn't even read the map. *I'm not that bad at drawing, am I?* she worried. She had then pretended to use a phone, but they'd only tilted their heads in confusion. Mitsuha assumed they were stuck in a more primitive era, one deprived of push-button devices, so she dialed back her impression to a rotary phone, funny sounds and all. She was certainly putting in her best effort. *Wait, what's with the applause?! I'm not a mime, damn it!*

And just like that, she gave up. Mitsuha decided to stay with Colette's family, helping out around the house until she completely recovered. She would then pack some rations and set off for town. *I'll send them my thanks when I get back to Japan. I have no other options here!*

Chapter 2: The Beast Must Die

And so, a few years passed.

Well, it was actually just three days. Through bouts of intense pantomiming, Mitsuha had somehow been able to get Colette's parents to understand what she wanted. At least, she hoped so. First, she'd asked them for permission to stay in exchange for helping around the house. She had also informed them of her plans to travel to the nearest town and requested a supply of food and water for the journey. Lastly, in a flurry of motions, she'd asked for directions to get there.

Mitsuha had long since given up on learning their language. She couldn't learn a great deal in just a few days, anyway. Mitsuha felt that as long as the larger town had citizens who spoke Japanese—or at least English—she could get her hands on a phone to call the embassy or someone in Japan. Then she would have no problem getting home, and once she returned, she'd never be in another situation where the local language was useful. She would send thanks to her benefactors, of course, but only with the help of a translator.

Another thing Mitsuha grasped from her talks with the family was that they thought she was a child. It was utterly unsurprising, especially considering she appeared underage by Japanese standards. In their eyes, she was only ten years old, or twelve at best.

You know what? I'm fine with that. For the most part, anyway. It's convenient for me, so I'll play along! If Colette's eight, I don't mind being her twelve-year-old friend.

As it turned out, it was a local custom for families to take in orphans or disowned children. It wasn't uncommon for these boys and girls to end up marrying the adoptive parents' real children once they grew up, and it would always be considered an auspicious occasion. "Now you are truly our child!" and whatnot. The majority married into other families, of course, but still treated their adopters as their real parents.

Then again, it was a small village, so everyone here was like family to begin

with. The mentality behind this practice could be summed up as, “It’s better to just look after orphans and lost children instead of handing them over to the authorities. Why waste time looking for parents who are either long gone or have abandoned their children?” Now it made sense as to why Colette’s parents were so kind to Mitsuha and didn’t seem to consider her presence a big deal. Well, she would be leaving soon anyway, so it didn’t matter all that much to her.

With that in mind, why did Colette spend half a day telling me all this? Waving her arms like crazy, drawing her family tree with some sticks... What’s the big deal? A girl on some branch of the family tree had lost her parents and been taken in by a family that had a son. She eventually married him, and now they both took care of their elderly parents and... *Hold on, wh-why are you staring at me like that?!*

If you ignored the discomfiting pressure from Colette, Mitsuha’s next few days had been pretty peaceful. She helped around the cabin in various ways, one of which was cooking. Even though the family had no spices or modern appliances, Mitsuha had learned to cook from her mother from the time she was in elementary school and knew enough to get by. The resulting dishes were so good that Erene, the lady of the house, was visibly irked.

Wood-splitting was an entirely different story. *Does it even count as housework? Isn’t this something the dad’s supposed to do by himself?* After muttering such complaints, Mitsuha quickly learned that preparing firewood was in fact Erene’s and Colette’s job. As she struggled to help them out, Mitsuha found the hatchet heavy and hard to use; she often missed her target. Even when she didn’t, the blade wedged itself snugly into the wood, and she failed to pull it free so she could finish the job.

Eventually, her skin began to peel, and her muscles started to ache. She was short of breath, and her legs wobbled beneath her. It didn’t take long until she was instructed to do something else. *Why is Colette so good at this? Look at her go! Those logs are flying…*

The next day, Mitsuha and Colette went out to the woods to forage. They had each been given a basket, but Mitsuha ended up holding them both. Not because she was confident in her foraging skills, but because it made it easier

for Colette to move around and work her “child of the wild” magic. An undoubtedly clever idea.

Wait, this is the forest I was wandering in, isn’t it? Mitsuha realized. *So this is how Colette found me. I gotta make it up to her since I wasted her foraging session!* She fired herself up to gather as many plants as possible. Colette had shown her samples of what she had to look for, so there wouldn’t be any problems... or so she thought. It turned out that they only grew in specific places, and you needed to know where to look. She had no luck finding any without Colette’s assistance. *Oh well, it’s not like I’m gonna make a career out of this. It’s okay as long as I can help out a little.*

Right about when the baskets were one-third full, Colette suddenly stopped. Mitsuha looked at her. The younger girl had gone pale. She gestured to Mitsuha to put the baskets down, and she did just that, even though she had no idea why. Colette slowly backed up a step and whispered, “Kel kolore, maltoneis...”

Oh, that’s one of the phrases they made sure I learned. While Mitsuha had determined she wouldn’t learn the language, she had memorized a few words to make communication a bit easier. After all, it was nearly impossible to get by without the bare bones of “yes”, “no”, “water”, “food”, “hungry”, “give me that”, and so on. Colette’s words had something to do with a dangerous beast being close, which meant…

Wait, WHAT?! But they told me beasts were rare around these parts! Colette literally drew me a picture to tell me that! Mitsuha felt herself panicking. *Oh, yeah, “rare” doesn’t necessarily mean they won’t ever show up. Silly me.* The two silently backed away, leaving the baskets behind. Mitsuha assumed they would come pick them up once the beast either left or was hunted down.

Shame there’s no saving what we collected. The stuff won’t dry properly under these conditions, so it’ll all be ruined by the time we come back. Whatever. Life’s way more important than a couple of plants. We just gotta sneak away, and... Wait, we’re going upwind here! This is real bad!

But hold on a sec. As superhuman as she is, there’s no way Colette could’ve noticed the beast before it noticed us, so there’s no point in sneaking around. Then why isn’t it coming after us? Is it not hungry? Is it chasing some other

prey? Is it an herbivore? Yeah, right—we're dealing with a real primetime thriller here. What is it waiting for, then? Think... Think! Come on, brain, you're a PC stuffed with random knowledge!

Done. I got three possibilities.

One: It's taking its time to make sure we don't escape. But it doesn't really need to do that for small, slow humans like us, right?

Two: It sees us as playthings and is toying with us just for fun. In that case, it'd have shown itself to try to scare us.

Three: It's using us as practice hunting targets for its young.

Two girls running on foot were relatively slow, so they would be unable to escape; additionally, the beast wouldn't have to worry about its young being hurt by some kind of counterattack. *Yep, human girls are just perfect for the babies' first hunt. Though one of us isn't really a "girl" anymore at this point, but let's keep that a secret.* It was just a guess on Mitsuha's part, but regardless, it was clear they were in danger.

Mitsuha racked her brain for the best way out. Should they buy time? She had no idea how late it would have to get for the villagers to come searching for them. Maybe at nightfall? Would they come then? Colette's parents obviously would, but others might find it too dangerous. Not to mention, the two of them probably wouldn't hold out long enough.

Mitsuha turned around and spotted a few creatures lurking between the trees. *One large wolf-like thing and a few smaller ones... I was right. They can't climb trees, can they?* she wondered, rapidly scanning the area for any trees with low branches. The wolves geared up to make a move, so she settled on the first one she saw instead.

"Colette!" she yelled, then grabbed the girl's hand and pulled her closer. The tree's limbs were out of reach, too difficult for beasts to climb, and despite their thinness would be stable enough to support Colette. Mitsuha clutched her by the armpits, lifted her off the ground, and shoved her into the tree.

"Mitsuha!" Colette cried her name and babbled out some other words she couldn't understand. Ignoring her, Mitsuha moved her hands from her armpits

to her feet and pushed her up. She quickly understood what Mitsuha was doing and began climbing the tree on her own. Once she reached the first branch, she pulled herself onto it. “Mitsuha!” she called out again, and reached her small hand as far down as she could muster.

“Sorry.” Mitsuha smiled and shook her head. “I’m not good at climbing trees, and that one probably won’t hold us both. Bye-bye, sweet pea!” The beasts slowly began to approach—with their prey staying in place, they may have thought it was giving up. Confirming what Mitsuha had glimpsed earlier, one adult beast emerged alongside three of its offspring. They were extremely wolf-like, so she chose to assume they were actual wolves.

She threw a stick at them as a distraction. It didn’t hit, but they understood it was a sign of aggression, and their lips curled into a series of snarls. *Good. That raised me from “weak and easy prey” to “prey that resists”. I got their aggro on me, so all I have to do now is lead them away!* She ran as fast as she could from where Colette sat wailing, “Mitsuha, Mitsuha, Mitsuhaaaaaaa!”

It didn’t take long for her to start panting. *I always wake up early, since I have tons of things to do in the morning. And I run out of energy real quick, since there were tons of things I never did. Besides gym class, my only workouts were airsoft matches my brother dragged me into, so I’m as weak as I look. I have good reflexes, but I’d be awful in a marathon.*

The forest’s terrain was unfriendly to a human sprinter, too, so the beast easily caught up to her. It didn’t appear to be trying very hard, either; Mitsuha figured it was just toying with her in preparation for the kill. *Only the big one’s chasing me. Good thing, too, since the little ones definitely can’t climb up Colette’s tree.* It wasn’t as though the larger one could, but Mitsuha wished she could’ve made sure by taking out one of its legs.

Gah, I’m already done for! I just need to make sure Colette gets away! she thought, but a moment later she took a wrong step, tripped, and crashed into a nearby tree. If the snarling wolf was out of the picture, it would have been right out of a slapstick comedy. *Ahh, I don’t wanna die! Colette! Dad! Mom! Bro!* She panicked, shrinking back against the trunk. As the wolf’s deadly fangs approached, various moments of her life flashed before her eyes.

Colette's smile, Mitsuha's parents, her big brother... He'd doted on her and taught her all sorts of things. She had loved him dearly and could always rely on him no matter how much of an... *eccentric* he was. It had always annoyed her how much he loved using one-liners he got from novels, and how smug he looked whenever he said the perfect line at the perfect time. But right now, in the face of death, she wondered what he'd say in this situation.

In the end, all that came from her lips was a loud, shrill "BROOOOOO!"

At that moment, Mitsuha vanished. The wolf, with its jaws still open, rammed its head into the tree. After writhing in pain for a bit, it stood up and whipped its head from side to side in utter confusion.

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With a thud, Mitsuha fell onto a bed. She'd materialized out of nowhere about one foot above it, and the place she was in now left her dumbfounded. Not because it was unknown to her—far from it. She instantly recognized that she was in her own house. Specifically, she was sitting in her brother Tsuyoshi's bedroom.

Before she could even think about why she'd ended up in his room and not her own, her body sprung off the bed. She knew her brother's room inside and out. Her legs walked her to the desk, and her hand made its way into the second drawer.

Huh? Umm, this is Tsuyoshi's room, right? Where's the wolf? Was it all a dream? What about Colette? she wondered, left far behind after her supreme reflexes took over. It was now "Spex", not Mitsuha, who was in control.

Whenever she couldn't spare time to think and every single second was critical, her body sprung into action. It ran along like a well-oiled machine as her thoughts inched their way to the present.

Um... I'm still wearing shoes, there's leaves on my clothes, and I'm a mess in general, so... it wasn't a dream? That means Colette is still... Mitsuha tried to right her reeling mind; meanwhile, her fingers emerged with a small nylon bag full of tiny pellets. They tore open the bag and poured the contents into her right pocket. The pellets were heavier than they looked, especially in these quantities.

Her arms wrested an object from one of the bookshelves, then fixed it into her belt. It was a “Falcon II” slingshot. Though it looked like a toy at first glance, it could deal as much damage as a .22 caliber mini-revolver. Tsuyoshi had trained her to wield it, and she was a decent shot.

Next, they opened a glass case, took out a gorgeous piece of metal, and shoved it into her pocket. It was a knife—the “Gerber Folding Sportsman II”. As her eyes fell upon it, Mitsuha remembered her brother’s words: “I heard there’s some country where every boy gets a folding knife from his dad on his tenth birthday. The elegant form! The glimmering metal! The threatening aura only real weapons have!” He’d made it sound like the best thing since sliced bread, but really, it was a pretty standard folding knife.

Mitsuha’s legs carried her down the stairs and into the kitchen. Her hands took over once more, pulling a carving knife out of a drawer near the sink. Sashimi knives were sharper and longer, but they probably wouldn’t have made it through wolf hide without breaking, so carving knives were the more reliable choice. After the blade was wrapped in a cloth for safety, it was fixed into her belt. Her trusty hands then grabbed a three-foot-long kitchen towel, folded it up, and set it on the floor. After it was filled with spices such as pepper, shichimi, and chili, they rolled it up and tucked it in her left pocket.

How’d I get here from the woods, anyway? No, forget it—right now I need to save Colette! But how? Wait, I was calling out for my brother and ended up in his room. Does that mean I can like, wish *myself places? In that case, I need to get something that can take out the wolves.*

But it was too late—her body had already done the job. Before Mitsuha realized it, she’d finished preparing everything she thought she needed. After she checked to make sure her reflexes hadn’t faltered or missed anything important, her thoughts were finally caught up. Mitsuha called this phase “Acknowledgment”.

Can I really go back? No, should *I go back? Will this stuff be enough against those wolves? I might die for real this time! I’m back in Japan now, safe and sound! Why should I go?! What reason do I have?!* Suddenly, Mitsuha recalled her brother again and wondered what he’d say about all of this.

She realized she'd made a mistake, but it was too late; his way-too-smug words were already resounding in her head. "Hmm? Dear sister, do you *really* need a reason to rescue a cutie in trouble?" *All right, all right, you've got a point! Jeez, bro. You're noisy, and a complete pain in the ass... But I still love you, damn it!*

Mitsuha appeared in the forest again and immediately slammed her forehead into a tree—far from a smooth return. Looking around, she saw no sign of her canine assailant. It must've run back to Colette, so time was of the essence. There was also no wind, so she had to be careful not to make too much sound. *Colette's still fine, I'm sure of it. They can't climb that tree, right?*

She dashed back to where she had left Colette, ignoring the sharp brush licking her skin, but covering the distance took longer than it had during her initial diversion. Once she arrived, she hid behind a nearby tree. The four wolves were barking up at Colette. She looked terrified but otherwise unscathed. Mitsuha took the folding knife out of her pocket, unfolded the blade, and carefully fixed it into her belt. She then took the slingshot in her left hand and used her right to prepare some pellets.

These pellets were made of steel, which was a bit unusual considering lead was the standard for slingshot ammo. According to Tsuyoshi, "Those are cheap and easy to mass-produce, making them perfect for airsoft. And they're heavy, but not hard enough to bounce off—meaning they sting like hell. But these babies are made of steel! Fire one of these off up close and you'll pierce right through your target. It's the manliest ammo there is!"

Mitsuha did have lead pellets, but since she was up against thick hide, she sided with her brother's fervent babbling. Loading one steel pellet in the slingshot, she stuck the frame forward and pulled back as far as she could. Mitsuha may have seemed weak on the outside, but that was only due to her size. She was strong enough to pull the tense rubber; her only real limit was reach.

Of course, that meant her shots would be weaker than, say, Tsuyoshi's. She would probably have to hit a weak spot to one-shot the adult wolf, and could only hope its young weren't nearly as tough. Tsuyoshi also owned a crossbow, but she'd never used it before, and reloading it probably took a lot of time. So,

she—or Spex, perhaps—had chosen not to take it.

Mitsuha did her best to aim carefully, but her hands were shaking so much she just chose to let go. She heard the whistle of the pellet flying through the air, then a shrill yelp as one of the smaller wolves collapsed.



D-Did I hit its head? There aren't any muscles there, so I guess it either pierced

through the skull or at least gave it a concussion.

Her shot had actually been intended for the adult. After all, it was the greatest threat present, so she wanted to at least weaken it. Then again, taking one out was good enough. Much better than missing, anyway. The big wolf had no idea why its offspring had collapsed, so it just ran around it, thoroughly puzzled. *Yes, it's still my turn!*

She carefully prepared and fired a second pellet. This one hit the adult, but only on its right thigh. It didn't hurt the animal whatsoever, and of course the now-alert beast had its eyes on her. If looks could kill, its glare would've made her drop dead instantly. The young wolves noticed where the adult—most likely their mother—was looking, and dashed toward her. Their mama looked bewildered for a second, then just stood in place, allowing her young to go in for the kill. She still assumed Mitsuha was a helpless child.

Mitsuha quickly fired the third pellet. This one missed. *Can't expect to hit them all.* She clicked her tongue in frustration as she prepared the fourth shot—probably the last before they came too close. She felt herself beginning to panic, but the distance they'd closed made her last shot more accurate and powerful. *Smack!* One of the two remaining juveniles collapsed. She'd hit its throat—a true weak spot.

Without even glancing at its fallen sibling, the last of the offspring sprung at her. She had already chucked aside the slingshot, yanked the carving knife out of her belt, and unwrapped the towel. Blessed with excellent dynamic vision and reflexes, Mitsuha had no problem dodging the inexperienced young wolf as it came at her. As she did, she swung the knife and tore through its neck, sending it to the ground like the other two. And then…

"AWOOOOOO!"

A blood-curdling howl echoed through the forest. Her children had been killed, all three of them. Even if they were still breathing, the cruel wilderness showed no mercy for beasts with such grave wounds. Her dear children, given to her by that strong, rugged alpha. She'd worked so hard to raise them, and they were so close to adulthood, but now she had lost them to clawless, fangless, furless practice prey.

Hate. Hate. Hate. Hate. Kill. Kill. Kill. KILL, was all that went on in the mother wolf's mind as she charged toward Mitsuha. *Here it comes!* She braced herself. She'd somehow taken out the young, but that gave her a final boss scenario with the mother. The wolf children were inexperienced, but this one clearly wasn't. Tricking her wouldn't be easy, and Mitsuha was a soft-bodied human who wouldn't stand a chance against her in a one-on-one brawl, so there was only one thing she could do.

As the wolf charged, Mitsuha fixed her grip on the knife in her right hand and reached her left into her pocket. *Fifty feet... Thirty feet... Fifteen feet... Now!* She swung her left hand and jumped to the left. "GROAAAH!" the wolf wailed and writhed on the ground, surrounded by a cloud of spices. *With their super sharp senses, wild animals probably can't handle all that pepper and chili!* Even Mitsuha was in rough shape, with fluid gushing from her eyes and nostrils.

But she had to use this chance if she wanted to win. Fighting against the pain in her eyes, nose, and throat, she raised the carving knife and launched herself at the wolf. Unfortunately, real wild animals were built to withstand human attacks. Even if it couldn't see or smell, a mature wolf wasn't weak enough to let its prey take it out without a fight. It gnashed its teeth and swiped with its claws.

Mitsuha didn't see a safe way to get close without it clawing or biting her, but she couldn't waste too much time, since the advantage she'd gained from her spice bomb was dwindling by the second.

What do I do? What would my br—oh, not now! She tried fighting the urge, but it was hopeless; she was already imagining what her brother would do.

As always, her brain selected just the right pieces from the "What Would Tsuyoshi Say?" archives. "A truly strong person is fiercely proud and has the guts to back it up," his voice rang in her head, followed by, "Did you know that wolves can't close their mouths if they've got something stuck in their throat?" It seemed like such a pointless fact to know. *Until now, that is!*

You better not have been messing with me, bro! If I lose my arm, it's all on you! Damn it, what am I thinking?!

"Why worry about losing an arm or a leg? Haven't you seen any movies where

people replace their limbs with chainsaws or submachine guns? It's totally metal!"

GAH! You're really just livin' it up inside my head, aren't you?! Not even death stops you from being a pain in the ass! Whatever.

Mitsuha jumped at the wolf. Coming from behind had seemed like her best bet, but it noticed and bared its fangs at her. She swung the carving knife around and somehow avoided any damage, then tackled it. She was now on top of its back, holding on with all her might. It couldn't attack her with its limbs in this position, and it couldn't turn its head enough to bite—*Wait, it can?! I had no idea wolf necks could bend like this!*

Left with no other option, she made the gamble of a lifetime and shoved her left arm deep, deep into the wolf's mouth. "GEH!" the wolf gagged, raking its fangs over Mitsuha's arm as it frantically tried to clamp down its jaws. The human was clinging to a wolf, the wolf had the human on top of it, but their battle had only just begun.

As she gripped the wolf's body, Mitsuha lost her carving knife. But despite all the chaos, thanks to some miracle, she still had one weapon on her—the beautiful blade her late brother had cherished so dearly. "G-GERBER FOLDING SPORTSMAN TWOOOO!" She shouted the memento's name—she felt he would've liked that—as she took it in a backhand grip.

Stab! Stab! Stab! Stab!

It was a short knife in the hands of a weak girl. The blade didn't go deep, but it was of high enough quality to pierce the hide and deal decent damage. Mitsuha was far past her limits now, beyond any adrenaline rush. She was barely even conscious, and her sense of caution had long left her. Her legs held the wolf in a crushing vise, and with her left arm in the beast's maw, she was pretty much fixed in that position.

Stab! Stab! Stab! Stab!

My arm hurts.

Stab! Stab! Stab! Stab!

I can't feel my hand.

Stab! Stab! Stab! Stab!

It's dark. When did the sun go down?

Stab! Stab! Stab! Stab!

Bro... Where are you?

The wolf thrashed and bucked but just couldn't shake her off. The girl's small stature and lightness worked in her favor. The arm in its mouth made it hard to breathe, let alone retaliate. It couldn't muster as much strength as before and felt something important leave its body. If the wolf had been capable of human thought, it would have been losing its mind to panic.

What is this thing on me? Prey? No! It's something else! Disgusting! Scary! What is this?! What's happening?! No, no, no! Help! Hel— Before long, all was silent, and nothing moved. No, two of the young wolves were still twitching, but that was the extent of it. Eventually, there was the sound of one small girl slipping down a tree. She fearfully looked from side to side and noticed something that made her gasp.

It was a wolf and a girl, lying on the ground so close to one another it was like they were entwined. The blood on the beast and the girl's arm, which was lodged in the wolf's mouth, was enough to assume the fight had been fatal. The girl from the tree quickly ran up to them and checked the other girl for a pulse and any more injuries, and was relieved to find her condition stable. She then picked up a knife-like blade that was lying nearby, finished off the young wolves that were still breathing, and ran off to the village.

Cautious and merciless. How like Colette.

Chapter 3: The Kingdom of Ambition

"Such a blank ceiling," Mitsuha murmured. *And I'm drawing a blank trying to remember it*.

"Do you understand words, little one?"

Uh, I sure do, thank you very much. And don't call me little!

"Do you understand words, little one?"

Oh, so this is like one of those shitty games notorious for not letting you make any progress until you say "yes".

"Do you understand words, little one?"

"Y-Yeah, yeah! I do, okay?!"

"A single 'yeah' would have sufficed, little one."

Shut up! And stop calling me little! Mitsuha felt there'd be no point in replying to a disembodied voice if this was just a dream. However, it felt real enough, and after all she'd been through, she figured she might as well assume this *was* reality. *If this is a dream after all, then I've got nothin' to worry about. But if it's not, and I treat it like one? Whoopsie.*

"Umm, I'm Mitsuha Yamano. What about you? Are you God?"

"Hmm... You are curiously unsurprised. No matter. I am here before you to tell you something of great importance. But first, I am no god, and I have no name..."

The "thing" then revealed the story of how it had come to be. It knew only that it was an ancient, extremely rare life-form. The "thing" theorized that its ancestors were alien creatures that had evolved beyond physical form and become beings made of pure energy, or thoughts, or something of that nature. It had no body, did not know death, and had no desires or goals. *Honestly, its existence seems pretty pointless,* Mitsuha thought.

But after eons of aimless drifting, the being had made a remarkable discovery—it had the power to travel between worlds! Armed with its new ability, it had

gained its first-ever desire: an interest in learning things it hadn't known before... A thirst for knowledge! Its consciousness had trembled in anticipation of having found the meaning of its existence— "Yeah, yeah, get to the point," Mitsuha interrupted.

"Again, a single 'yeah' would have sufficed."

Anyhow... The "thing" traversed and observed countless worlds and came to know the concept of "fun". But on one fateful day, as it floated above a certain world, it had suddenly been assaulted by an intense, unpleasant, and confusing sensation. Later, it realized that it might've endured what animals with physical bodies knew as "pain". The experience was altogether new, so it was intrigued, but it was also puzzled as to how a non-physical being *could* feel pain.

The "thing" had probed itself for an explanation and found that a piece of itself was missing. The unknown attacker had entered its area of influence—the equivalent of a body in normal life-forms—and used powerful mental energy to tear away some portion of its essence. The assailant then traveled to another world, but the being's introduction to "pain" had left it confused and unable to track them. It continued to observe the world until it sensed the missing part nearby. When it felt the piece move to another world once more, the "thing" was finally able to follow.

"Huh? Was it me that did that?"

"Indeed, it appears so. But fear not... I will not fault you for this. It seems the event was accidental, and I have not been inconvenienced by it. In fact, I feel I should thank you for granting me knowledge of 'pain'. It was new to me."

Phew, what a relief! I thought it was gonna ask me to pay its medical bills or something.

"So, what did you want to tell me?" she asked.

"Oh, yes... I have neglected to say it. It appears that your mind carries such strength and intensity that you have absorbed the fraction of my energy you tore away."

"Huh?! I-Is that bad?"

“Worry not. This will do you no harm, mental or otherwise. However...”

“H-However?”

“You seem to have acquired the ability to travel between worlds.”

HUUUUUH?! Wait, so that’s what happened!

Mitsuha had torn off a part of the “thing” and thereby gained the power to travel between worlds. And because of her strong wish to survive the fall, she had jumped to another world, taking the part along with her. Apparently, it was the last world the “thing” had visited prior to Earth. Additionally, the part had now merged with Mitsuha so thoroughly that trying to remove it would cause irreparable damage. *Yeah, I think I’ll stay like this, thanks!*

“Now, explaining the situation and telling you of your power was merely a way of expressing gratitude. If there is anything else you desire or simply wish to know, then by all means, speak. The part of me within you has the potential to give you more powers.”

Anything I want, huh? Well, I... Ah!

“Umm, could you teach me new languages?”

“Languages, you say? Truly an important thing when traveling between worlds... Very well. I shall make it possible for you to understand and copy the languages of those you converse with. Do bear in mind this is limited to language. I advise against seeking power to absorb knowledge beyond that. The amount you could acquire would be too much for your feeble mind. Besides, having the capacity to read absolutely anything would reduce the excitement.”

HEY! My head’s got plenty of room! I’m not stupid, damn it! Mitsuha snapped internally.
The higher being had a point, though, so she felt it best to listen.

“Let’s just go with that, then. By the way, does moving between worlds use stamina or something? What’re the costs and limits?”

“Costs? Well... The burden it places upon you is akin to moving between adjacent rooms. Repeating this motion a few hundred times would leave you

quite fatigued and breathless."

Ohh. Well, it's true that moving between rooms a couple hundred times would be exhausti—Wait, THAT'S IT?!

"Any other inquiries or requests?"

"Hmm, I don't think so..."

"Such a lack of desire. There's still room for another power, so allow me to at least offer you a restorative function."

"Details, please."

"It would be weak, and therefore slow, but it would gradually heal any wounds you obtained. Given enough time, lost limbs will regrow, and scars will vanish as if they were never there. Consider the wounds on your left arm. They would leave a mark, no?"

Whoa! That'd help a lot! It's actually amazing!

"I'll take one order of healing powers, then, please!"

"Certainly. I am well aware that a long life with physical impairments is difficult. This is no trouble at all, and will only take a moment."

"Hehehe!"

"It... feels as though your attitude toward me has changed."

The being exercised some unseen force upon her and then prepared itself to leave.

"I will come see you again after this planet has spun a few tens of thousands of times. Be in good health until then."

Those were its last words, and it took Mitsuha a few seconds to realize that it was talking about hundreds of years. *I'll be dead by then! Or did it mean around the sun? I'll be dead either way, though...* Her conversation with the "thing" had actually been some sort of direct interference in her brain, and once it had left, she automatically drifted to sleep. As her consciousness faded, something finally dawned on her.

"Oh, so I'm not dead..."

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I recognize this ceiling, Mitsuha mused in her usual fashion. *The bed too. And there's Colette, the sweet little girl sleeping on my legs. So, got her parents to bring me here again, huh? I hope this doesn't become a trend. Oh, I'm covered in some kind of bandages. This must've cost them some money... I'm sorry.* However she felt, it was time for her to think about what would come next.

What she had assumed to be a village in some developing country was really part of a totally different world—one that was way behind Earth in terms of technology and civilization. She had also gained the power to freely travel between this world and Earth.

YEAAAH, JACKPOT! Now I don't need to worry about work, or college, or anything! This world's gotta be full of gold and jewels and all kinds of stuff that'll rake in the money back home... and stuff from Earth could be worth a fortune over here. If I brought some over and sold it, I'd be rich!

Then again, if Mitsuha overdid it, she risked hurting the other world's development. *If I brought over something too advanced and made it popular, everything related to it would eventually crumble 'cause the foundation for it wouldn't be there. And if I brought over something* really *out there, I could collapse the economy or destroy some industries, which would cost people their jobs and drive them to suicide, or maybe they'd even form hate mobs!*

She also ruled out things that would depend on her so much that abandoning them would cause chaos. *Super influential stuff that's centered around my existence is a big no-no.* Another thing she had to keep in mind was that if she attracted too much attention, she could be targeted. *I've gotta keep things quiet until I have some backup.* Of course, she could always escape back to Earth, but that would be her last resort.

Although Mitsuha's thought patterns were a bit unusual, she'd always been a well-behaved, sincere young lady. This demeanor had gained her lots of friends who were still quite fond of her, even if they'd grown distant because of work or college. Because she had such a personality, Mitsuha decided to earn money with her newfound powers without bothering anyone else.

Mitsuha was actually quite careful, though this quality had frequently surprised the friends who assumed she was a loose cannon. She wouldn't hesitate to make risky moves whenever it was necessary, but she never took such gambles when it wasn't. This was most likely because she grew up while looking up to her brother.

Anyway, Mitsuha considered that her world-jumping ability might vanish one day. While she found it unlikely, she didn't think it was impossible, and so made her plans with this in mind. She would set up a base both in this world and on Earth and earn enough money to live comfortably on either side. She decided to make one billion yen in each world, for a total of two billion.

That sum, Mitsuha determined, could see her comfortably until her one-hundredth birthday, even if the economy became turbulent. She wouldn't be living in the lap of luxury, but a yearly income of twenty million yen was more than enough for her. Beyond that, her earnings wouldn't matter much. She could just sit back and do something she loved, like writing books or selling handmade crafts, even if it didn't make much money.

Now, I don't know if this is a kingdom, an empire, or a republic, but I'm gonna rack up two billion and become a WINNER AT LIFE! BWAHAHA! BWAAAHAHAHAHA!

This was the birth of her ambition.

Chapter 4: Preparation

Colette woke up shortly after Mitsuha, and chaos ensued. She let out a wail and launched herself at Mitsuha, too fast for the older girl to dodge her incoming bear hug. Mitsuha yelped, then began rapping her shoulder in a desperate attempt to signal her surrender. Colette's parents, upon hearing the ruckus, bolted into the room.

"Stop, stooop! Ow, it hurts! You're breaking meee!" Mitsuha shouted, and Colette finally loosened her grip.

"M-Mitsuha! Y-Your words!" Colette replied in shock. Her parents looked equally dumbfounded. Thankfully, Mitsuha had already come up with an explanation.

"First of all, thanks for everything you've done for me, Colette. Actually, I learned your language back in my country. I couldn't speak it because I lost my memory. Just now, though, it all came flooding back to me."

"Really? I'm so happy, Mitsuha!" Crying loudly, she clung to Mitsuha again. Her parents nodded, their eyes brimming with tears. *They're such good people,* Mitsuha thought, all smiles. When Colette finally calmed down, Mitsuha decided it was time to gather information.

Because she was from another world, Mitsuha had to tread carefully when talking about herself. For this reason, she'd invented her own backstory: she hailed from a distant country, and for reasons that were conveniently glossed over, she'd crossed over the sea and come to this continent. She purposefully chose to say "this continent" over "this country"; for all she knew, their current region could've been landlocked. Mitsuha and her party had been separated during an attack by wild beasts, but otherwise she didn't remember much—only that she'd found herself in Colette's home the moment she woke up.

Mitsuha also didn't know this world's class system, so she avoided using the word "noble", but still led them to believe she was a high-ranking member of society. Her choice to do so was a bit of a risk; commoner-nobility relations weren't always good, to put it lightly, so it might've been upsetting for Colette

and her family. Thankfully, they didn't seem to care.

It makes sense, honestly, Mitsuha reflected. *The clothes they found me in weren't farmer-like at all, so they probably figured it was something like that. If not, then maybe their beef with nobility is just local, and they don't care about foreign blue bloods at all. Or they just don't really get it, if y'know what I mean.*

After her story concluded, it was Mitsuha's turn to ask about her situation. *I'm gonna get all the info I need and then some!* She found out she'd been out cold for a whopping five days. Nearly a week... She couldn't blame Colette for worrying. Mitsuha had no idea if it was due to exhaustion and shock or if it had something to do with whatever the "thing" had done to her, but she didn't really care either way. Also, they hadn't forgotten to retrieve her possessions—knives, slingshot, and everything else. *How thoughtful.*

Anyway, the beasts they'd encountered were, in fact, wolves. The villagers had rounded up the corpses and reduced them to fangs, fur, and meat, not letting a single part go to waste. They'd split and eaten the meat, since it would've gone bad otherwise, but the fangs and fur were still unused. It turned out that they'd been reserved for Mitsuha, along with some money for the meat. *Aww, that's so sweet it's gonna give me cavities!* she thought. But considering they all believed she was penniless and wanted to do her a kindness, it would've been rude of her not to accept. *I'll have someone buy the fangs and fur off me, though.*

The villagers were extremely thankful that she'd gotten rid of the wolves before they could hurt someone. It made sense, especially considering the animals could've easily picked off one of the village wives or children. Colette, for one, wouldn't have stood a chance if she had been cornered alone. But Mitsuha wasn't entirely sure she'd killed off *all* the wolves. *I mean, they* are *pack animals, aren't they? And it was a mother wolf with her young, so there's gotta be a father, too, right?*

She wasn't convinced it was safe yet, but if the locals thought so, she wasn't going to argue. The wolves here might've been different than the ones she knew. Perhaps it was normal for local mother wolves to take their young on training trips, or maybe she'd had a messy divorce and was bringing the kids back to her parents' den. *Whatever, it doesn't matter at this point,* she

concluded.

Once she was caught up, Mitsuha fired off all sorts of questions about the country they were in: the value of its currency, the nearest town, the capital, how developed it was—not directly, of course—and so on. Peasants didn't know much, obviously, but she was satisfied with getting about half the knowledge the farmers knew by heart. By the time she was finished, she had another question she really wanted to ask but couldn't: *Why the heck does Colette know more than her parents?!*

On the third day after waking up, Mitsuha went against her little keeper's objections and took a walk by herself. According to the villagers, when they'd brought her in from the woods, she was in such terrible shape that Colette had been completely frantic. But her seemingly grave wounds had healed since then, and now Mitsuha could barely feel so much as a bruise.

Still, persuading Colette to let her go alone had proved to be quite a challenge; she'd rattled off more reasons than you could imagine. This solitary trip was absolutely, positively necessary for her. Finally, Colette had relented and gone off to forage, though she'd glanced back at least a dozen times. After she disappeared, Mitsuha checked to see if she was really alone, then jumped back to her home on Earth.

Whoa, I've missed so many calls, she thought as she glanced through her phone. *Well, I didn't—I mean, couldn't—respond. Everyone's probably worried sick... Better reply to 'em all.*

After that, Mitsuha checked the mailbox. Her bills were all paid automatically, so there was no problem there. She also made her way to the local police station to let them know she was safe and sound. They'd helped her out a lot when she was dealing with her uncle and the delinquents when they'd gone after her money. She wanted to quell any worries they may have had about her recent absence.

Next, she enjoyed her first bath in ages, changed into fresh clothing, and handled a few other assorted tasks. She couldn't wash the clothes she'd been wearing and risk appearing suspiciously clean, so she left them in their current condition. She'd don them again when she returned to the other world. There

was also no point in going shopping since she couldn't bring anything into Colette's house. All she'd had when Colette found her was a cheap shoulder bag containing a folding umbrella, tissues, and a disposable shopping bag. *Patience, Mitsuha... You'll get to take lots of stuff along once you leave the village.*

She finished up her earthly business and returned to the village long before evening, but Colette still interrogated her about where she'd been and what she was up to. *What the heck, she came back way too fast! I guess she rushed it 'cause she was worried about me.*

Mitsuha was so occupied with her world-jumping and schemes to get rich that she'd completely forgotten about the men who'd approached her on the cliff. The moment they'd pushed Mitsuha off the edge, she'd screamed so loudly that the nearby couples had witnessed it in full. They'd wanted to avoid involvement when the delinquents were merely hitting on her, but they couldn't ignore a murder.

After Mitsuha fell, the girl from the young couple let out a shriek, her boyfriend snapped photos of the perpetrators, the old man called the police, and his wife took pictures of their car. It was some impressive teamwork. The thugs had panicked, shouting that it wasn't their fault and other such nonsense, then jumped into their car and peeled off. But with all the witnesses and photos, it didn't take long for them to get caught and arrested. Everyone thought this was an open-and-shut case.

It quickly hit a wall, however, because *they couldn't find the victim's body.* The police had even checked every local file for a missing person, but found no one who fit the description. This was partially because the victim was described as a child in either elementary or middle school, so Mitsuha was completely out of the investigators' range. They had multiple witnesses and the criminals' confessions, but the victim was a Jane Doe and her body was nowhere to be found. The police were at a loss.

On the other hand, the three men were getting what they deserved. Mitsuha would've surely died if it hadn't been for her strange and coincidental collision with the ancient being. The fact that she'd survived changed nothing; they'd still committed an act of murder, so it was fair to punish them appropriately. If they were let off the hook, they'd surely go on to do similar things and harass other

people, turning more innocents into victims.

After her family had passed away, Mitsuha ended the newspaper subscription they had. Cable TV and the internet were more than enough for her. The papers also piled up fast, and she couldn't be bothered to clean them up—not to mention that the mailman always crammed them into the mailbox like he was stuffing away his broken dreams, so people could tell whether or not Mitsuha was home at a glance. If some seedy types discovered she wasn't around as often, her property would've been in danger.

Mitsuha wasn't on Earth when the cliff incident was still new, and even during this last visit, she'd been too busy replying to all her missed messages to watch TV or browse the web. She hadn't had a chance to see the story, and by the time she returned again, all the news outlets had completely dropped it. Mitsuha never heard about the investigation or even recalled the men from the lookout.

Back in the other world, it was almost time for Mitsuha to move forward. Seven days had passed since her brief trip back home, and her wounds had healed so well she had to hide the fact that they didn't leave a single scar. Some villagers had gladly purchased the wolf fangs and fur. Apparently, juvenile wolf hides were quality goods; they didn't carry nearly as much damage as an adult's, so the three Mitsuha sold had earned her a pretty penny. The buyers had also said something about refining the materials and selling them to the nearby town. *So you do have contact with a town,* she thought.

Endowed with her newly-acquired funds, Mitsuha could now tell everyone she wished to go on a journey. She planned to head to the town where the local lord resided, then make her way to the capital from there. From what she'd learned, the local lord's town wasn't all that impressive. Though not as rural as this village, it still fit the image pretty well. Nevertheless, it was the most developed town in the area, the starting point for capital-bound carriages, and most importantly, the place where the local lord lived.

After her encounter with the wolves, Mitsuha had befriended villagers other than Colette, which helped her learn much more. All of them had made sure to thank her, and the elders—thinking she couldn't move because of her wounds—sat around to converse with her. The villagers didn't know much individually,

but once she put it all together, she had an impressive amount of information. In the end, she became more knowledgeable about the nearby town and the local lord's family than anyone else present.

I'll start by schmoozing the lord, Mitsuha decided.

According to the villagers, he was a surprisingly good person for a noble. He cherished his subjects, never hesitated to postpone taxes during bad harvests... Basically, the people had hit the jackpot with him. Not only that, but he was a count, meaning he also had a lot of influence in the capital. After all, if you ignored dukes, who had royal blood, the only ones above counts were marquis.

The town's about eighteen miles away, Mitsuha thought*. At least, that's my guess based on what the villagers told me. But if they walk at some crazy pace like twelve miles an hour, then that eighteen could easily be a hundred! Ugh, all right, enough of that. For now, I've gotta focus on wining and dining the count so I can get a carriage to the capital. I really need his support.*

What? Wondering how I'll pay for the carriage and *get by in the capital? Sure, the money I got here won't be enough, but again, that's where the count comes in.*

Additionally, she had yet to take care of her biggest obstacle.

"NO, NO, NO, NOOO!" Colette yowled. "DON'T GOOO!" Mitsuha couldn't bring herself to blame the girl. The two had saved each other's lives, and there weren't many girls around her age in the village. If Colette wasn't out foraging, she was all over Mitsuha, especially after the latter had sustained some severe injuries.

"Sorry, but I gotta go," Mitsuha told her. "I wanted to do this from the start. Besides, my people and I had agreed to meet up in the capital if something went wrong."

"B-But, but...!" Colette simply would not give in. Not even her parents could calm her down.

"All right, then let's make a promise. After I get settled in the capital, I'll come back here and tell you all about it. And if you ever go there, I'll make sure to see you no matter what." Colette whimpered, but was slowly calming down.

“You’re a smart girl. You know you can’t stop me, right? So, please... Smile for me? I’ll be thinking about you all the time until I see you again, and I don’t want to remember you like this.”

“Hic...” Colette let out one more sob, then forced her wobbly lips into a smile. Her father, Tobias, marveled at the sight. “This girl’s practically a master seducer!” he whispered. *Okay, now that’s just rude!*

The next morning, the villagers saw Mitsuha off as she finally departed for the town. She had a bag filled with necessities: specifically, a gallon of water and four meals, two of which were light. The villagers had decided that, since the journey took a whole day for adults, it would take two days for Mitsuha. They’d stuffed her bag accordingly, without leaving so much as an inch for anything else.

Mitsuha hadn’t brought very much along with her in the first place, yet the villagers had attempted to load her up with blankets and other supplies. Had she brought them, she wouldn’t have been able to stand, let alone walk. Some people even offered to come with her, but she firmly refused. *That’d be* seriously *bad for me.*

Anyway, she more or less had to force her way out of the village. She’d been told it was rare for someone to go to town; it was a two-day journey there and back, three if you spent a night there. It was just too far for anyone to go there without having some serious business to attend to. Staying at one of the town’s inns was also a small luxury. The village was mostly self-sustaining, so the people here didn’t earn enough money to pay for a room, food, *and* wares.

The bottom line was that no one went to town without a very good reason. Anything they couldn’t acquire from within the village could often be bought from the traveling merchants who dropped by every now and again. They even took requests and would do their best to bring the items along on their next visit.

Mitsuha was well aware of the fact that she could choose *not* to go to town, and they’d be none the wiser. If some villagers decided to trek out that way in a few weeks or months, she doubted they would walk around asking about her. Even if they did, they wouldn’t learn anything because she’d never have arrived

in the first place. *It's not like I'm not planning to go to town,* she thought. *I'm just gonna be* completely *off schedule.*

Mitsuha now had a full understanding of her cross-world movement—"world-jumping", as she liked to call it. The "thing" had installed this comprehension directly into her brain. According to the intangible manual, the first area she'd jumped to had been determined at random, but now she could go wherever she wished.

There was one caveat: she could only travel to a place she could picture, which in this case meant somewhere she'd visited before. She could jump between places in one world by using the other world as a stepping stone. For that, she first had to get there using normal methods, but once that was done, she could jump there whenever she desired. So for now, Mitsuha would go straight to town, then return to Earth to make some preparations. After all, getting close to the lord and securing a way to the capital wouldn't be easy.

Once she'd walked a good distance from the village, Mitsuha jumped home, hopped onto her trusted scooter, Scooty, then jumped back once more. The path between the village and the town was barely used, so witnesses weren't a problem. Even if someone did come across her, she could just jump back to Earth. The terrain wasn't very smooth, so she couldn't travel at full speed, but she arrived at the outskirts of the town after just an hour of driving. She hadn't met anyone on the way, so everything was going according to plan.

That's enough for today, Scooty. I'll walk the rest of the way when I get back. Now it's time to get busy! Mitsuha returned home and changed into some casual clothes. She walked to the station and took a train to the nearest city with an American military base. Some Americans were along for the ride as well, most likely servicemen assigned to the base. *Looks like I don't have to wait till I get there for this part,* she thought.

"Excuse me." She directed her words to the most intelligent-looking man there. She simply asked if the train would stop at the first city that came to mind, thanked him when he responded, and walked to the neighboring car. She then exited at the next stop and traveled back to her starting point. With that, Mitsuha gained the ability to speak, write, and understand English.

Why had she chosen this man in particular, you ask? Well, her ability essentially “scanned” the brain of the person she was speaking with in order to copy their language. Normally, she’d be able to acquire the most there was to know about a language by interacting with many different speakers, but since she had a limited pool to choose from, she made an effort to pick the most knowledgeable person she saw.

Once she returned home, Mitsuha got on the internet and began running some searches. The keywords, the results, the sites—all of them were in English, and she consumed page after page as part of her preparations.

◇ ◇ ◇

Thousands of miles away, there stood the headquarters of a minor mercenary organization. The group had a relatively upstanding reputation. By mercenary standards, that is.

“Captain. You got a visitor,” one of the mercs reported, opening the door to an ordinary-looking office.

“Pretty sure I had no appointments today,” replied the man in charge.

“It’s an unannounced visit. That okay?” The captain took a moment to mull it over. They weren’t on any major missions, and the money from small jobs could pile up and help cover the squad’s operating costs.

“I’ll be there in a sec... Take ’em to the reception room.”

“Roger that. Heheh, you’ll be surprised.”

“Whazzat? Is it a hot chick or somethin’?”

“Hmm... You could say that.”

Yeah, right. There’s no way in hell a woman like that’d come here, of all the damn places, he thought in disbelief as he made his way to the reception room. When he opened the door and saw who waited inside, however, his jaw nearly dropped.

My boy wasn’t lyin’ after all. Well, shit, I sure am surprised. He eyed the visitor. She was far from a “hot chick”, but “pretty girl” seemed close enough.

“Nice to meet you,” the girl began. “My name is Mitsuha, and I have a request

for you...” His guest was an elementary schooler with silky black hair, mystical dark eyes, and a well-proportioned, doll-like face. The captain listened to the entirety of her monologue before speaking up.



“So, you’re tellin’ me you wanna learn to use small arms, get some target

practice, train in knife and short sword fightin', and for us to get *all* that gear for ya, huh...?" Child or not, she was a client. He was in charge here, so obviously he knew how to talk business even if he *was* weirded out by the whole situation. The girl nodded in response.

"Handguns are the most immediate matter. In particular, I'd like a small one I could carry with me at all times for self-defense, a powerful, high-capacity pistol I could use as my main weapon, a light revolver I'd switch to if the others jammed, a set of holsters for all three, and training in how to use them. Everything else is secondary. The knife and sword training might not be too useful... so feel free to gloss over them. Assume it's just for intimidation."

"Says here ya also wanna learn to use machine guns, assault rifles, snipers, and grenades, plus rocket 'n' grenade launchers... Li'l lady, what the hell kinda megacorp ya goin' after?!" He couldn't help but raise his voice. *Crap, I lost my cool.*

"I'm planning no such thing...! This is merely for self-defense. My country is currently in a state of unrest, you see... Oh, and of course I will be paying in advance."

Where the hell're ya from?! Do yer hoodlums have tanks or somethin'?!

"Ah, I currently have a lot of Japanese yen lying around," she remarked. "Would it trouble you if that's what I paid with?"

"Well, sure, yen's a whole lot better'n yuan or won, at least," the mercenary replied. "There'll be a fee when we turn it into dollars, though... Yer gonna cover that, right?"

"Oh, but of course. I don't mind at all. Ah, but I *may* switch to using gold coins. Would you accept those as well?"

Gold coins? Seriously, who the hell are ya? If he could've raised an eyebrow any further, he would have.

"Got nothin' against it, but what kind we talkin'? Krugers? Maples?"

"No. They would be nameless coins from a nameless country. Just think of the value of the actual gold in them. I'll bring you a sample sooner than later, so you can have it appraised. But..."

“But?”

“Keep in mind you may eventually have to convert these coins by the hundred—no, by the thousand.”

After they came to an agreement, the girl left. *She was hella shady... no... hella weird, but I had to take that job. Somebody’s gotta cover these squad costs, damn it!* The captain was fairly sure he’d made the right choice, but for some reason, the hand holding his cigarette still trembled. He’d ordered one of his subordinates to follow her. *Now I just gotta wait till he comes back.*

“I’m back, Cap’n,” the man in question said as he came in.

Uhh, okay, that felt a little too *fast.*

“How’d it go?”

“Sorry, but... I lost her.”

What? She shook off this *guy?*

“I saw her turn the corner on her way outta the base, but when I went after her, she was gone. I looked around the place, but I couldn’t find her anywhere.”

“What kinda bullshit is that?! There ain’t no more turns for miles!”

His subordinate had no reply. He had nothing else to say, either. *Man, I guess I really do need to get the guns,* he thought as he stared at the objects on his desk. There was a thick roll of yen and a piece of paper with the girl’s—Mitsuha’s—measurements on it. They needed her sizes to know what kind of holsters to get her.

An A cup, huh...

◇ ◇ ◇

Man, that was sooo stressful! Mitsuha thought.

Her conversation with the captain had been the first time she’d spoken with someone in English outside of her classes. On top of that, his being a foreigner *and* a mercenary didn’t help settle her nerves at all.

Keeping up the act of some high-class lady was really hard! I was totally drenched in sweat! After her business was done, she vanished from the

mercenary base. They might have sent someone to tail her, but it didn't matter. She simply walked out of the front gate, turned right, and jumped.

She'd chosen that particular group after hours of online research. It had surprised her to see how varied mercenary groups were. Some were enormous, some small, some were upstanding, some scum of the earth, and so on... Then again, perhaps it was strange to call any mercs "upstanding". Still, she'd gone for the one that looked more reasonable than most.

If she'd felt she was making a mistake, all she had to do was make herself scarce. *Staying off their radar seems easy enough. And if they tried to capture or violate me, I'd just crush them.* If their armory was suddenly emptied, or their funds and documents went missing along with their safes, the mercs would have their hands too full to concern themselves with some runaway girl. *As a world-jumper, I'd make a great thief, assassin, or terrorist... But that isn't my style! Teehee!* She only hoped this new relationship wouldn't turn sour.

As for how she got to another country so easily... She'd essentially had an epiphany.
She had initially been under the impression that, because she needed a concrete mental image of any place she wanted to go, she had to have been there at least once. But it had occurred to her to try a little experiment. She'd absorbed TV shows, movies, and newscasts that showed a specific place, then checked a satellite photo of the location. This had given her a mental image as good as—no, even better than—the one she'd have if she saw it in person.

The result? A complete success. Mitsuha could now jump to many different spots outside of Japan. However, she could only use this tactic on Earth. There weren't any photos or satellites in the other world, after all, meaning that she had to actually travel to her destinations at least once. How horrible.

I'm basically burning through Mom and Dad's money... But this here is like any initial investment. A necessary expense.

Her thoughts were directed toward a necklace on the table. It was a real luxury product. The necklace was adorned with pearls a third of an inch thick and had cost her over a million yen. This was actually her greatest weapon, so she couldn't have settled for something cheap.

Right beside it was a Gerber folding knife. Not the one Tsuyoshi had left behind, but a new one she had just purchased. There was also a Swiss Army Knife and a Randall hunting knife. On a nearby clothes hanger, there was an expensive-looking—and actually quite expensive—dress, partnered with a pair of heels. Besides that, there were some spare sets of clothes, as well as a couple accessories. Mitsuha carefully put everything in a large backpack, got dressed, and equipped whatever she could.

All right! Moving out!

Soon she was standing in front of a large door. Taking deep breaths, she prepared herself. It was finally time for the next step in her plan. She grabbed the knocker and rapped it on the door, creating loud thunks. Though no one could hear her, she shouted from within her thoughts.

Hellooo!

CHAPTER 5: IF THE PEARLS ARE A WEAPON, MITSUHA IS A WMD!

"Master Bozes, you have a visitor," the butler announced.

"What? I was sure I had no such arrangements today," replied Count Bozes, his curiosity piqued. Stefan was a reliable butler who had served the Bozes family for over two generations. He wasn't one to make absurd mistakes, and it wasn't like him to announce the arrival of any unappointed, untrustworthy visitors.

Did he perhaps deem the guest worthy of my audience? the count wondered. *Then I shall trust his judgment.*

"Very well. Let them into the reception hall as soon as I'm ready," he ordered, yet Stefan lingered.

"What of the lady and your children?" he inquired. *What? Is he saying my family should join?! What is he thinking?*

"Call them, then."

"As you wish." *I chose to trust his judgment, and I will do so until the end.*

Soon the count was in the reception hall, accompanied by the entire Bozes family: his wife, Iris; his firstborn, Alexis; his second son, Theodore; and his daughter, Beatrice. Their reception hall paled in comparison to the grandeur of royal throne rooms. All that furnished the room was a large, rather plain table surrounded by chairs.

Summoning the family to meet a guest who came with no prior notice was unheard of. Count Bozes' wife and children looked fittingly bewildered and uneasy. He hadn't told them anything, for he himself had been caught unawares. But that was something he simply couldn't give voice to. *I hope this isn't a mistake, Stefan.*

At last, the butler led the guest inside. "This is Lady Mitsuha von Yamano. She hails from the land of Japan. The lady claims to have come to greet Count

Bozes."

The girl surprised him immensely. She had silky, well-groomed black hair, a face like that of a doll's, and clothing unlike any he'd seen before. The garb looked comfortable and had numerous pockets, while the belt she was wearing supported knives and other curious tools. He had never heard of her country, but he wondered how a noble lady—a girl barely older than ten, at that—ended up traveling without a retinue. He was livid. Not with the girl, but her parents and everyone else around her.

Why didn't they stop her? How could they allow this?!

"A pleasure to meet you. I am Mitsuha von Yamano," she introduced herself. "As I came from a distant land, I felt I should acquaint myself with the ruler here—so I implored your butler for an audience with you. My apologies for such a brash decision."

Such refined speech at such a young age, the count marveled. *I can understand why Stefan allowed her in.*

"I see. The long journey here must have been exhausting," he replied. "Feel free to rest here as long as you need to. Now, if I may ask... Why, if you came from such a faraway place, did you choose to call upon us rather than those at the capital?" It was standard for foreigners to head straight for the capital. He couldn't think of a single reason for them to stop by a town like this.

"Yes, I can see why that might be curious. On my way to the capital, I was attacked by wild beasts, and the people of this region saved my life. I came to inform you of their deeds and express my immense gratitude."

"What? Is this true?!" he uttered in surprise.

How delightful! Rather than looting or killing, my people went out of their way to help a stranger who now comes to express her thanks. And my children are here to see it, as well. What a glorious day! The count basked in bliss as Lady Mitsuha took something out of her pocket.

"Though it may be a meager offering, there is something I would like you to have," she said. "It comes from my country, as well. Please accept it as a token of my gratitude." Stefan took the item from her and brought it to the count.

“Wh-What is this...?” he wondered aloud. Its profound weight made it apparent that it was metallic, but it had a brilliant color and an elegant feel to it. It was an elaborate object he’d never seen before. He couldn’t imagine what it was used for, but somehow understood that it was the work of a master craftsman.

“That is a foldable, multi-purpose knife,” the girl said.

“A knife?! This?!” he exclaimed. It was detailed and looked to be worth a small fortune, but he couldn’t imagine how something so hard to grasp was a knife, let alone a foldable one.

“Yes. Though it isn’t the sort you use in battle,” she explained. “It is more of a tool than a weapon. There are several small tools hidden within: a blade, scissors, and a file, among others. You will understand it if you pinch the side between your nails and pull.” The count did as he was told and managed to pull out the tools.

“S-Such fine detail,” he said, dumbfounded by the object. He was not alone; his children surrounded him, staring at it with great curiosity. “This is truly remarkable. I feel I must give something in return. Lady Mitsuha, what do you intend to do next?”

“I intend to make my way to the capital from here.”

“You mustn’t!” He stood abruptly, raising his voice. “It will be dark soon! Not to mention that a child like you should never go on such long journeys alone! I cannot allow that!” He’d dropped his noble, overly polite tone and shouted, but that was the least of his concerns. “Wait three days,” he added. “A capital-bound carriage will arrive. You can take that.”

“Umm, this is quite embarrassing, so please forgive me, but... I don’t believe I have enough money to pay for the carriage...”

Huh? Lady Mitsuha’s unexpected response rendered him speechless. *A girl in such fine garments, who just thanked me with a tool worth dozens of gold, can’t afford a simple carriage? Oh, of course... She and her party were separated, and they were the ones holding the funds. That makes sense; no noble girl with a group ever pays for things by herself.*

“Tonight, you may stay here,” the count declared. “And I expect an explanation later on.”

He wanted her to rest before joining them for dinner, so he ordered Stefan to lead her to the guest room. Right after they left, he put his elbows on the table and his hands on his head.

“Dear,” his wife spoke up.

“Sorry, but allow me to gather my thoughts,” he cut her off, furrowing his brow. Iris smiled faintly and led the children out of the room. Left all by himself, Count Bozes wondered, “Just who *is* that girl?”

The Bozes’ butler saw Mitsuha to the guest room. Though she wore an unassuming expression, she was grinning on the inside, thinking, *Victory!* Once she was alone, Mitsuha began taking things out of her backpack. The carefully-packed dress, the heels protected by packing material, the folding knife stored in its case, and the luxurious pearl necklace—today’s eye-catcher. The preparations were going swimmingly.

I’m a new Mitsuha now, she thought. *Not Mitsuha Yamano, but Mitsuha von Yamano... A high-class girl from a faraway land! I’ll play the role of a brave heroine—one who hides her true identity to live as a commoner in this country! Wait, no, I won’t “play the role”... I’ll become just that!* She convinced herself with such thoughts as she looked in a mirror.

Mitsuha had given up on trying to play a normal commoner from day one. She couldn’t have acted like a farmer if she’d wanted to; they’d have suspected her the moment they saw her clean, unblemished hands.

A few hours later, Stefan came to escort Mitsuha to the dining hall. Upon seeing her, he was so flabbergasted that he accidentally let out a gasp. It was perhaps the greatest blunder the iron-willed butler had ever made.

“Master Bozes, I’ve brought Lady Mitsuha,” Stefan remarked.

“Excellent. Lead her to her seat.” Unlike Mitsuha’s previous audience with them, this was an informal and unofficial family dinner with a guest. There was no need for embellished language.

The moment Mitsuha entered the hall, the entire Bozes family briefly forgot

how to breathe. A shining, pure white dress, sparkling enamel shoes, and a pearl necklace of unimaginable value. However, all these were merely side-actors working to emphasize the girl's beauty. All was silent, and it felt like time had stopped.

Suddenly, a sound broke the spell. Stefan had made a particularly loud step, bringing the count back to reality. The others soon followed, albeit awkwardly. Iris, in particular, couldn't take her eyes off of the necklace.

"Thank you all very much for having me," Mitsuha said as she lifted the hem of her skirt and lowered herself in a simple curtsy. She then took a seat in the chair Stefan presented.

"B-By all means, make yourself at home," said the count, whose full name was Klaus Bozes. "Once again, welcome to the Bozes mansion. This is a family gathering. No need to concern yourself with manners and whatnot, and feel free to dine at your leisure. If you are too tense, the food will not taste nearly as good."

Mitsuha merely responded with a smile.

As they ate, they talked about only the most inoffensive matters. Klaus apologized for not introducing his family during the first meeting and proceeded to do so. Better late than never, of course. They moved onto discussion about the county's specialties, places that sold the best food, et cetera. It was fun, but not exactly fruitful. But after dinner, with only tea, alcohol, and snacks left on the table, it was finally time to address the elephant in the room. Everyone was tense, Mitsuha included.

"Now, Lady Mitsuha," Klaus spoke up.

"Y-Yes?!" she piped.

"Oh, no need for such a reaction. Relax, it's nothing serious."

"A-All right," she replied, still tense. Relaxing wasn't exactly easy in this situation.

"Now, might you tell me who you really are? If possible, I'd like the most honest answer."

There it is! Mitsuha thought.

"It's true that I came here from a distant country," she began. "I introduced myself using my family name to gain audience with you, but now that I'm in a foreign land, the social status I had in my homeland is almost meaningless." None of that was a lie. She did indeed come from a *very* distant country and had used her family name to meet the count, regardless if the name was real or not. But from this point on, the floodgates for her lies were wide open.

"As for why I left my country, well... There was an issue regarding who would be the heir. My father passed away from illness, and it was only obvious that my wise and gentle younger brother would take his place. However, some fools insisted that *I* was the better candidate. Before they could make me the successor and commit any wrongdoings, I left a hastily written letter and my home behind.

"I believe they intended to make me the heir so they could force me to marry one of their sons and eventually usurp the family name. If I'd stayed nearby, I would've risked capture, so I sailed to this continent. I brought with me only a few personal effects, including this necklace—a memento from my mother." Mitsuha laid out her polished story.

Oh, I think I can understand those who pushed for her to be the heir, Klaus thought. *They must be quite distraught that she ran away because of them...* He pitied the non-existent vassals.

"Anyway, I can't go back, so I've resolved to try to live in this country," Mitsuha continued. "If I sell my mother's memento, I should have some of the funds I need to—"

"YOU... YOU'RE SELLING THAAAT?!" Iris screeched. "D-Do you have any idea what sort of necklace that is?!"

"Ah, yes. These are real pearls, so I imagine it would be quite valuable. Are you suggesting these are fakes?"

"Huh...?! You truly don't understand!" Iris was so agitated that she started banging the table. "Listen, girl—pearls are priced in a very wide range. The value changes based on color, shape, size, nacre thickness, and more. Now, consider your necklace! The pearls are among the greatest in size, and almost

perfectly spherical! The profound color tells me everything about the nacre thickness!

“And to chance upon an entire set?! One or two pearls are more than enough! You can make beautiful rings, earrings, hairpins, or brooches with just that. But a whole necklace, made entirely of such high-quality pearls?! What nonsense is this?! Do you have any idea how many shells you have to go through to find one pearl?! And how many of those pearls, do you think, would be fit for accessories?! A necklace of the very best, most vivid pearls you could ever get?! Impossible! This simply shouldn’t exist!” She banged the table again.

Seeing their gentle mother turn so menacing frightened the children.

“Umm, Lady Iris, would you like to have it...?” asked Mitsuha.

Her explosive offer turned Iris to stone. She slowly and rigidly looked at Klaus. The tectonic shifts in her neck were practically audible.

Klaus turned pale and asked, “I-Iris, what would be the market price for this?”

“Market price? Absurd. Again, this is something that shouldn’t exist. That is an invaluable, one-of-a-kind treasure. It’s a status symbol you could boast about anywhere in the world, and no one could ever hope to match you. It’s a dream of a treasure, and history would remember you for merely possessing it. Do you truly believe any affluent king or merchant would be averse to parting with their wealth for this?

“Oh, and bear in mind, you mustn’t bring it to auctions. People would try to take it by force and wouldn’t hesitate to kill for it. And the one who presented it —you—would be kidnapped on the very same day, then violently interrogated about where you got it.”

EEEEK! IT’S A WAY BIGGER DEAL THAN I THOUGHT! Mitsuha shivered at the lady’s words. She’d bought the necklace under the assumption that cultivated pearls didn’t exist here and therefore would sell for a good price, but this was beyond what she could’ve imagined. She was aware that a cheap accessory in one world could be a real treasure in the other but had no idea a cultivated pearl necklace would be this powerful.

I should’ve gone for the necklaces in the 300,000 to 500,000 range, not the

1.3-million-yen luxury. Or maybe I should've gone with artificial gems... Mitsuha had tried to keep in mind that certain kinds of jewelry could mess with the market, and she could be hunted down for the source. That was why she'd brought it straight to the Bozes' mansion—to keep it off the market entirely.

This trade was my make-or-break gamble, she thought. *I was sure I'd come out of this with enough money and allies to get my own place. That's why I went for the most expensive one I could find, and... Ah!*

"Lady Iris... What if I break it apart and then sell the—EEP!" Mitsuha was immediately gunned down by Iris' glare.

"BREAK IT APART?! IT'S A DIVINE TREASURE FIT FOR GODDESSES! DO YOU WISH TO INCUR HEAVENLY WRATH?!"

What am I supposed to do now?! After a brief silence, she decided to try selling it once more. She had no other choice.

"But what am I to do if I cannot sell it? I have no money, and there's no one I can rely on in this country. I'll be at a dead end. No matter how pretty, this necklace is useless to me. I'd rather have the means to support myself!"

"But is that not a memento from your mother?" the count asked.

"Mother would never want me to cling to it so strongly that I starve to death. She'd prefer I sell it and live a happy life."

"H-Hmm, I suppose that is true..." The count was doing his best to prevent any sale of the item, but her argument made him fall silent.

"That's why I would like Lady Iris to have it. No one would press a countess into telling them where it came from, and it won't appear on the market, so there will be no upheaval."

"B-But, the price..." The count grew stiff. It was time for her to go in for the kill.

"I need only enough funds to start a shop in the capital. I can handle the rest myself!"

"But Mitsuha, you..." Lady Iris looked completely taken aback, but Mitsuha couldn't stop now. She already had a plan.

“It’s fine. Also,” she said, looking up at her, “I really want you to have it. If I ever need to remember my mother, you could hug me while wearing it and...” She fell silent and cast her eyes downward. Lady Iris shook as tears filled her eyes.

“Oh, Mitsuha!” She rushed over, her chair collapsing as she gave Mitsuha a tight hug.

“Lady Iris...”

Yes! It’s working! Mitsuha thought. These nobles had no TVs whatsoever, few books they could read for fun, and barely any other forms of entertainment. Their only access to stories was through plays—rare events even for the elites—and bedtime stories from their mothers or nurses. They had next to no resistance to basic, tear-jerking sob stories, so they’d quickly latched on to hers.

Of course, the Bozes were no fools; in fact, they were really quite capable. But just as Mitsuha had been told, everyone in the family was a kind, generous person. Perhaps Mitsuha would have chosen a different path if this one had any downsides, but there were none. The situation at present was advantageous to all involved.

After everyone calmed down and the hall became peaceful again, the three children, who hadn’t been able to bring themselves to speak over their father or enraged mother, finally joined the conversation. They were dying to talk to Mitsuha.

“Mitsuha, your beautiful black hair, those mystifying dark eyes...” said the eldest. “They must be gifts from a goddess, bestowed to you alon—”

“Ah, most of the people in my country look like this.”

Alexis, the firstborn, was shot down within seconds at the young age of seventeen. Say a prayer for him, if you would.

“Mitsuha, that multi-purpose knife you gave Father is simply incredible. Did you bring anything else from your country?” asked Theodore. He was the second son, fifteen years old. You could tell he was prudent just by looking at his face. In an RPG, he’d be the mage, no doubt about it.

“Oh, I also have a regular folding knife,” Mitsuha said before lifting her dress,

taking the knife out of a thigh belt, and placing it on the table. “Here it is.”

“M-Mitsuha!” Beatrice cried, while Alexis and Theodore flushed red as beets. *Huh? Did I do something?*

“It’s sharp, so please be careful.” Mitsuha unfolded the knife and handed it to Theodore.

“Wow,” he gasped. The blade’s sharpness and beauty, the detail on the handle, the portability and security stemming from its foldability... All of it came together and left him awestruck.

“Ah, would you like to have it?” Mitsuha asked him.

“Huh?”

“I keep it for self-defense, but I have another one. Care to buy it for one gold coin?”

“Y-Yes please!” He didn’t hesitate one bit. The conversations during dinner had given Mitsuha a pretty decent grasp of the local currency’s value. She had spoken to the villagers about this as well but didn’t feel entirely confident in their fiscal sensibilities. No offense intended, of course.

Anyway, she estimated that one gold coin was worth about 100,000 Japanese yen. *I just sold that knife for a little under ten times its original value, so I’d say I’m being pretty generous here,* she mused in satisfaction. *At least by my store’s standards. I’m sure a gold coin isn’t much for a noble boy, anyway. Consider it a first-customer discount, kiddo.*

Wait a sec, I brought a weapon to a noble family’s dinner! Did I mess up? She quickly scanned her company. *Oh, well, they don’t look all that bothered.* Although Mitsuha didn’t think much of it, you could objectively say it was a really bad move. Her saving grace was that it happened in this particular household. Everyone here thought of Mitsuha as a pretty, yet frail, little girl. Surely someone like her needed a weapon for self-defense, right? That was the Bozes’ consensus, but if other nobles had been around, they wouldn’t have been so lenient.

The gleam in his brother’s eyes must’ve made Alexis jealous. He closed in on Mitsuha and pressed, “Hey, anything else?! Do you have more stuff?!”

“Hrmm...” Nothing came to mind at first. “I really can’t sell the other one, since I need it for self-defense on my journey. If there’s anything else from my country that I can get rid of, it would have to be my spare underwear!”

“SOLD!” he shouted reflexively. He was immediately met with several ice-cold glares.

“Alexis...” said Lady Iris, staring down at him.

“Dear brother...” Beatrice joined in.

The chill of their combined disappointment had frozen Alexis in place. It might be worth noting that Count Bozes had opened his mouth and nearly said the exact same thing as his eldest child but was now sighing in relief that he hadn’t. *There are lines you can’t cross, Count!* Mitsuha thought upon looking at him. *Anyway...*

“That will be five silver coins, please.”

“You’re actually selling them?!” the Bozes exclaimed in unison. Theodore was the lone exception. “I’d pay one small gold coin,” he said, upping the bid as though it were an auction.

Well, that sure came out of left field, Mitsuha thought. Due to Lady Iris’ intervention, however, the sale never occurred and she didn’t receive her small gold coin. *That would’ve been about 10,000 yen... What a shame. Hey, I’ll have you know the underwear were unused!*

“By the way, you said you’d open a shop in the capital. What kind of shop, sweetie?” asked Beatrice. At age thirteen, she was the youngest child and only daughter. Her golden hair and azure eyes gave her the look of an exemplary noble girl, but instead of being a “thorny rose” type, she was actually quite lovable.

She seems to think I’m younger than her, and I really can’t blame her. She’s about as tall as me, maybe a little taller, and she’s already at least a C cup... Mitsuha was crying so much on the inside that she had to stop herself from tearing up. *It’s my race, okay?! She’s white, I’m Asian! You don’t compare chihuahuas and golden retrievers, do you?! Same thing! There’s just no point! Got it?!* Her thoughts were so intense that she actually began panting. *C-Calm*

down, Mitsuha! Deep breaths! In... and out! In... and out!

"I'm thinking of opening a general store," she said.

"A general store?" Beatrice looked puzzled.

"Yes. I'd sell trinkets, make-up, cute accessories... Mostly fun things for girls with a few practical goods thrown in, too. Also, I'd like to have an advice corner where I would share knowledge from my country."

"Wow, that sounds great! But what do you mean by 'advice corner'?"

"From what I can tell, this country is quite different from mine. So, if people here have a serious problem that has already been solved in my country, I think could help by giving them the solution."

"Now that is certainly intriguing," Count Bozes said.

Oh? Do I smell some networking? Mitsuha thought, before asking, "Is there something troubling you, Count?"

"Hmm, I would say so, yes," he replied, seemingly lost in thought. After a moment, he forced a taut smile. "For no discernible reason, the last couple of harvests in our region have yielded less wheat than before. I doubt something can be done about it, however."

"Huh? Isn't that just repeated cultivation damage and a lack of fertilizer?"

"What?" He stared at her, stunned.

Mitsuha explained that growing the same crops over and over used up the same nutrients and wore down the soil. He would have to use a few other crops and "rotate" between them, as well as fertilize the fields by using them as pastures, or covering them in a layer of compost or humus. She didn't name any crops and left out a lot of details—that information came at a price.

The count paid without a second thought and asked question after question. All the talking dried Mitsuha's throat, so she began drinking. Their conversation went off on a tangent and they branched into other subjects.

"You need to develop a special product! You have two options here: you either make something that can only be made in the Bozes' county, or something that's way better than the competition! You gotta turn your name

into a brand!

"Raise tariffs and you get less tax money! That's common sense! Expand domestic demand! Increase purchasing power! And attract the merchants! MERCHANTS!

"Inventions! Invent something and make lots of it! Let's think of something right now!" The end of the conversation was nowhere in sight, and Mitsuha's voice seemed to be growing louder.

There's something off about her, thought Iris, who soon realized that Mitsuha was not holding a glass of tea or juice, but wine instead. Unable to deny the worth of the girl's words, however, she feigned ignorance. She was a noble's wife to the core.

"Mitsuha, you're digging a hole for yourself here!" cried Count Bozes, who was also slightly drunk.

"Oh, come now, Father! Ah..." Mitsuha froze.

Why did I say that? Did my tongue slip? I was having so much fun, it was like I was fooling around with my family again. I didn't cry when it *happened... I could hold it in just fine. During the funeral, too. And now, I…*

Before she knew it, Mitsuha was shedding tears.

"It's all right, I don't mind if you call me 'Father'," said Klaus as he gently embraced her. Mitsuha clung to his large, manly chest and cried like a baby until it exhausted her to the point of sleep.

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I don't recognize this ceiling, Mitsuha thought. *That joke is gettin' old, huh?* She was now alone in the guest room, buried under her bedsheets. If they didn't know better, someone peeking in might've assumed she was a shut-in. And she was, in a way, considering she'd sequestered herself in her room out of sheer embarrassment.

I actually cried! Wails, waterworks, and all! I'm now an adult woman who actually cried into a man's chest! Well, sure, the count's a softie and a good guy all around... And everyone seems to have officially declared that I'm twelve

years old, so maybe this isn't so bad.

The carriage heading for the capital would arrive in two more days, so she simply planned on waiting it out. This situation was too tricky for her to jump back to Earth. She had the time but couldn't risk them finding out she'd vanished into thin air. Either way, she had everything she needed with her, so she didn't feel there was much of a problem.

Let's see, two knives, one short sword, three handguns with spare magazines... Hm? Wondering why I've got two knives when I told Alexis I only had one? Well, I was just talking about the folding knives I'd hidden on me for self-defense. The "one" I mentioned was the Randall hunting knife I had tucked in my belt for all to see.

Huh? You think I got too many weapons? Come on, I need this many in case I get attacked by bandits or monsters along the way! The revolver's for when the other guns get jammed, and the hidden weapons will come in handy if I get attacked while changing. The hunting knife is for emergencies, but it has other uses too, like slicing goblin ears and stuff... What? We don't have quests like that here? Alrighty, then!

The short sword was really just for show. The people of this world probably wouldn't see the handguns as weapons, so Mitsuha couldn't be sure she wouldn't be targeted by, say, human traffickers who saw her as easy prey. The blade therefore served as a sort of "Hands Off!" sign. *Oh, and there's my training, of course!*

Let us turn back the clock to a few days prior, when Mitsuha had returned to the captain's room of the private mercenary organization, "Wolfgang".

"There y'are, li'l lady," the captain said upon her entry. Quite the greeting.

"I'm here, Captain," she replied. Her words made him sigh and hang his head. This was a mercenary group, but he was just "Captain". No one actually called him by name. *It's probably not a good thing for mercs' real names to get out there,* Mitsuha reflected. *Maybe they're happy as long as their group gets famous? No clue.*

"Prep's all done. Follow me," he said, and led her to the shooting range.

“Whoa!” she blurted. Seeing the weapons on the long table made Mitsuha so excited she couldn’t contain herself.

“It’s the stuff you ordered,” Captain explained. “First up, the decorative short sword. This thing’s new, not an antique. Antiques are fragile and blow a hole in your wallet. It comes with a sheath, so just tuck it in your belt. It won’t be much good in a fight, but since you’ll be usin’ your guns, you ain’t gonna need it.”

Mm, looks about right for me. I shouldn’t have a problem holding it, anyway, she thought.

“Next up, the self-defense gun—a Walther *PPS.* It’s small and weighs just over a pound. It uses 9-millimeter bullets and can fit eight of ’em. Nine if you count the one in the chamber. It gets the job done in most emergencies. If you want something even lighter, there’s .22 caliber guns, but they don’t pack much of a punch. This one’s popular among women lookin’ to defend themselves.”

Yep, looks fine to me.

“Now for your main weapon—a Beretta 93R. At two and a half pounds, this thing’s heavier, but it uses fifteen-and twenty-round mags, plus the bullet in the chamber. This one’s 9-millimeter, too. This guy’s biggest draw is the three-round burst mode. You can switch between single-fire and burst like *this*.” He gave a small demonstration.

“Go apeshit and you’ll run outta ammo in a second, but it’ll work wonders when you need to take someone out the moment a scrap starts. Keep it on burst mode, and switch to single-fire when you need to.”

Oho. Yeah, it’s kinda heavy, but I like the burst mode. Great choice, Captain!

“And that over there’s the revolver. It’s .38 cal,” he said, and not a word more.

Huh? That’s it? You hate revolvers or something?

“You can use your spare magazines to play around with different bullets. There’s armor-piercing bullets; they pass through bulletproof vests. Hollow-points can incapacitate the target even if you miss critical spots. If you’re using a rifle, there’s FMJs, and machine guns have tracers and incendiary armor-piercing bullets.” *Y-Yeah…*

“Now, try gettin’ it in yer holster and make it fit. Then it’s time for handling instructions and shooting practice. I’ll tell ya how to care for ’em and give ya a few things to keep in mind. We’ll do the maintenance on these for ya, though. Bring ’em here after you’ve used ’em a lot or when you feel it’s time.”

So, in other words, Mitsuha couldn’t have been more prepared for the journey. *Ah! I should’ve brought some grenades, too! I messed up!*

Huh? You’re wondering if I could actually kill people with these? Of course I could. Did I have a reason not to? I wouldn’t kill regular people, of course. That’s obvious. But if someone tried to kill me, why would I spare them? Would you expect me to respect their life and let myself die instead? What a joke!

Or what, you think I could just tie ’em up and give them a stern talking-to? They’d just attack me again the moment they got free. And if not, they’d go after someone else. Just how many good and honest people would get hurt? Anything that’d happen to them would basically be my fault. If innocent people got killed, I’d be their murderer. Scumbags who took the wrong path in life are barely human anymore—they’re beasts that are better off put down.

Oh, and killing enemy soldiers is fine by me, even if they aren’t scumbags. They could be good husbands and fathers just looking out for their families, but if they chose this line of work and approached someone with the intent to kill them, they couldn’t really complain if they were the ones who got killed. Sure, some fight because they got drafted or something, and I feel for them, but in the end, my life is important and I don’t want to die, so I don’t really have a choice.

I’ve seen movies where the main character hesitated to kill the enemy. What the hell was that all about? Was he okay in the head? Did he have a bad case of stupid? It was even worse when their hesitation caused their friend or lover to die, leading to even more misery, regret, and uh... Basically, they should’ve saved the thinking for after they killed the enemy, right?

What? No? Okay…

“Mitsuha! It’s lunchtime!” A girl’s voice jerked Mitsuha from her swirling escapism and plopped her back into reality. The one calling out to her wasn’t the butler; perhaps he was apprehensive about waking a girl who’d cried herself to sleep. If so, he certainly excelled at his job.

That's Sebastian for you, Mitsuha thought. *Oh? His name is Stefan? My bad.*

The lunch was an uncomfortable experience. Not to worry—everyone was still very kind to Mitsuha. They didn't even mention yesterday's events... but their consideration somehow made it even more painful. She was so mortified, she couldn't even look at the count. In an attempt to make her feel more at home, he brought up all sorts of talking points.

Huh? Inventions? Salt production? Dessert research? Whoa, whoa, whoa, what kinda stuff did yesterday's me tell you?! Please pretend you didn't hear anything! Huh? Which one do I like more? Out of what? Oh, your sons... Okay. I'm not interested in either right now. Please call me again when they haven't tied the knot for so long you're worried the well might dry up.

What? Why the long faces, you two? Oh, by the way, I don't mind taking little Beatrice. Huh? You don't wanna be called "little"? Y'know I'd be your older sister if I married one of your brothers, right? What? You'll stop that no matter what? Well, do your best. I'll cheer you on.

After lunch, there was a scramble. For what, you ask? Well, for Mitsuha, actually. The count wanted to talk about agriculture, forestry, taxes, and special products. Lady Iris wanted to play dress-up with her using Beatrice's old clothes. Alexis invited her for a long, scenic trail ride, but she'd never been on a horse.

As for the younger children... Theodore wanted to hear more about knives. Mitsuha did know about a few things, like forging, alloying, carbon percentages, and tempering. But she couldn't help but wonder, *What kind of guy insists on talking to a girl about blades?* Beatrice, on the other hand, simply wanted to have girl talk. That was understandable, as there likely weren't any other noble girls her age in the county.

All right, time to try and sell those (unused) underwear again. Small gold coin, here I come!



This and that happened, and it was finally time for Mitsuha to head out to the

capital. Oh, in case you're curious, they'd talked it out and decided that they would share her. She'd spent some time with one, then another, until everyone had their turn. She'd barely been able to catch a break.

Also, why the heck did Stefan join the sharing discussion? He's a butler, right?

Anyway, as we've established, miscellaneous events had occurred, and it was now time for her to leave.

"Take care of yourself, Mitsuha. And try not to get involved with suspicious men," said Lady Iris. *Oh, don't worry, I had tons of practice with Alexis,* Mitsuha responded internally.

"We'll be going to the capital too. Be sure to wait for me," said the suspicious man in question. The ballroom season, a time when the nobles gathered in the capital for various parties and occasions, was approaching.

I'm sure glad it's not right now, Alexis…

"Tell me more about your country next time," said Theodore. He had a keen interest in technology.

Too bad I can't tell him anything big. Not yet, anyway. Patience is a virtue, kid!

"When I come to the capital, let me show you around to all the good food stalls!" said Beatrice. The girl seemed to have quite an appetite.

Last, but definitely not least, was the count. "Be careful on the road," he said. "I gave your retinue an official letter demanding you're given the money you need. There is a limit, of course, but you should be able to buy anything short of a luxurious palace."

I can't thank you enough, Mitsuha thought. She now had enough money for the trip and anything else she might need right away. She also had gold coins she could give to the captain. She was dying to know how much they were worth back on Earth.

"Have a safe journey." Stefan saw her off with a bow, and she walked to the carriage alongside her retinue.

Yeah... my retinue.

The Bozes simply hadn't allowed her to travel by herself. She'd argued that

she would be with several other passengers inside the carriage, but they'd still refused. With the ballroom season so close, they'd also wanted to send two of their servants as an advance party and figured they might as well go with her. One was a maid in her mid-twenties and the other a bodyguard who looked about thirty. The journey was a week long, so at least Mitsuha would have someone to talk to.

The carriage wasn't the usual decorative sort used by nobles, but a covered wagon that could fit a good number of people. It was drawn by two horses and resembled one of those prairie schooners you might see in Westerns. Besides the two coachmen who took turns driving it, there were seven passengers: Mitsuha's party of three, a rather chubby, middle-aged merchant, a young mother with her daughter, and a young man dressed like an adventurer.

Adventurer?! That's not a real job, damn it! Mitsuha quickly scolded herself for her fantasy as she realized he was probably a bodyguard. *Could easily be just a passenger, though.* Either way, it would be a long journey. Mitsuha hoped to chat with them to gather information, so she figured she'd find out sooner or later.

A few hours passed. Mitsuha had come to realize that her group—herself, a maid, and a bodyguard—clearly looked like a noble girl and her retinue. She could tell the other passengers were puzzled as to why she didn't use her own carriage; she saw it in their eyes. Even worse, they actively avoided her or pretended she wasn't there at all. *Ugh, come on, damn it!*

Seven days later, they arrived at the capital. *And guess what? Nothing bad happened! We weren't attacked by any bandits or starving monsters at all! It makes sense, really. If bandit attacks happened all the time, no one would ever travel or trade. Yup! I knew that!* It wasn't as though racking up protection had been meaningless, however. She was certain it'd be useful sooner or later.

The carriage had picked up and dropped off many people along the way. As Mitsuha chatted with the maid and bodyguard, the others had realized she was harmless and quite like a commoner, so they'd broken the ice too. She was able to learn a great deal from the merchant. She even felt like doing him a couple of favors once she became rich. He, too, had been bound for the capital.

Once they left the carriage, Mitsuha's attendants tagged along with her instead of going straight to Bozes' capital mansion—count's orders. They couldn't leave her side until she got to the inn. *What a helicopter dad,* Mitsuha thought. He'd first insisted she stay at their capital mansion and wouldn't take no for an answer. Getting him to let her go where she liked had been grueling work. She'd had to utter such banal lines as, "I can't become independent that way! I want to live as a commoner, not a noble!"

Why did he act like he had any power over me, anyway? I just stayed at his place for a couple days and sold him a necklace. For cheap, too! Hmph! Though... yeah, I did wanna make sure I locked down his support. But wait, he's the one who recommended the inn. It's not some fancy noble joint that costs an arm and a leg, right?

To Mitsuha's surprise, it was a pretty normal inn aimed at commoners. As it turned out, the lady in charge of the place was from the Bozes' county and acquainted with the count. To him, this was just a cheap, reliable inn. The maid and bodyguard waited until she checked in, passed the letter to the owner, and departed for the Bozes' mansion.

All right, I can now jump back to Earth as much as I want! Time to get serious... Let's find a place where I can make my fortune!

CHAPTER 6: A PLACE TO CALL MY OWN THE INN WAS AS STANDARD AS THEY COME. THE HOSTESS WAS A LIVELY LADY MARRIED TO THE SILENT CHEF WHO EXCELLED AT HIS JOB. THEY HAD A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER WHO NOTICEABLY LACKED CAT EARS, AND WHAT A SHAME THAT WAS. THE GIRL REMINDED MITSUHA OF COLETTE. IT WAS STILL TOO SOON TO VISIT HER, SADLY—THE TIMING WOULD'VE BEEN AWKWARD.

Nothing's stopping me from having fun with this cutie, though! Oh, she's too busy helping? Okay... she sighed.

Mitsuha went to her room, gathered her things, jumped back to Earth to drop them off, then returned to the inn with some new supplies in tow. The dress and shoes had served their purpose, so she left them at home in favor of spare underwear and daily necessities. Reputable or not, Mitsuha felt that the inn couldn't be completely thief-proof.

I wouldn't be set back too much if my soap or underwear got pinched, but that dress is another story. It cost me a whole lotta money!

Mitsuha changed into some plain clothing and wandered around town. *Strategy 101: gain an advantage by getting familiar with the land!*

She guessed the main roads would be safe during the day but wore a handgun in her shoulder holster and a knife in her thigh belt just in case. *I'll probably have to be more careful once I start to stand out.*

The place really did give Mitsuha the impression of a capital. Even though this world was still developing, she found the buildings impressive. She found the meat skewers to be pretty delicious, too, though she chose not to think about what was in them. She steered clear of dark alleys and slums. She had no need for any cliché, life-threatening encounters.

Once the sun began to set, Mitsuha headed back to the inn. The dinner was... commendable, perhaps? A lot of effort had gone into it, but with spices being such a luxury, the meal tasted bland. It wasn't bad, per se, but she still found it lacking. *Ah. I can just bring some spices from home,* Mitsuha thought as she cleaned her plate. She then returned to her room, jumped back home, and had the most refreshing shower.

After lunch the next day, she wasted no time going to the real estate agent. While it might've been early, she had woken up so late she'd nearly missed breakfast, so she was fairly sure the place would be open. She had to ask for directions a few times but eventually found the right place. It had the count's seal of approval, so surely she had nothing to worry about. Regardless, she meekly walked inside. She could've barged in as though she owned the place, but it was like a habit by now.

"Good day to you!" said the young man behind the counter. Obviously, those weren't the words that came out of his mouth, but that was how Mitsuha's brain processed them. "Welcome to our establishment. How may I be of assistance?"

Wow, he's treating me like a customer even though I look like a kid, Mitsuha thought. *He's good at this. I knew I could count on you, Count Bozes!* Slightly impressed, she handed him an envelope.

"Umm, I would like a shop with living quarters attached, please. Here, I've got a letter of referral." The employee took it and glanced at the name on the back.

Immediately, his face went pale. He asked Mitsuha to wait for a moment, then hurried through the door behind him.

Wow, look at him go... A count's word sure is effective, she thought.

Moments later, he was replaced by a much older man. This gentleman was also a bit panicky but kept his composure as he said, "My apologies for the delay. I am Lutz Zoltan, the owner. Welcome to my humble establishment. How may I be of service?"

The big cheese himself, huh? Mitsuha thought. Makes sense. *That letter proves I've got ties to a pretty powerful noble.*

"Pleased to meet you, sir," she replied courteously. "I'd like to start up a shop."

"Yes, it said so in the letter. We have several properties that might suit your needs. Shall we discuss the details?" He led her to a sitting room further inside the building. Normal customers were most likely dealt with at the counter, so this was surely the VIP treatment.

Maybe they'll give me some free sweets?

They did, and Mitsuha found them overwhelmingly... so-so. She figured they were good by this world's standards, but they couldn't even compare to Japanese desserts. Her face might have given away her lack of enthusiasm, but Mr. Zoltan didn't seem upset. He most likely assumed she ate better sweets daily. Or he could have been too tense to pay it any mind.

"Here's what we have available," he said as he presented and explained her options.

All right, anything in the noble district's out, Mitsuha decided. *Sure, it's probably peaceful, and the clientele'd be good, but these prices are insane, and I don't wanna deal with nobles all the time. There wouldn't be many commoners around, either. Well, it's not like I don't like nobles. I know there are good and bad people in all classes—from royalty to slaves. But I feel like I'd get bored and tired pretty quickly if I had to deal with nobles all day. It's not a real store without the occasional patronage of a lowbrow simpleton. Uh-huh.*

She wasn't recommended anything close to the slums to begin with, so

excluding the noble district left her with properties in the commoner district. She could either choose to be closer to the center or closer to the nobles.

Hmmm... Pretty sure I'll need noble money flowing in if I want to make a fortune, she thought. *There's some good food around there, too. And no, that's* not *why I walked around town yesterday! Honest!*

"Umm, may I take a look at this one, this one, and this one?" she asked.

"Certainly," said Mr. Zoltan. "Would you like to go right away?"

"Yes, please," she replied, and the two prepared to leave. Not before Mitsuha stuffed the rest of the sweets into her pocket, however.

Huh? Why does the server girl look so sad? W-Wait! Were the rest gonna go to her? Using the same sweets twice might not be ideal for the establishment's reputation, so it wasn't unusual to think they'd give away leftovers to staff members or children. *Boy, did I screw up... Sorry! I'll make it up to you with some Japanese sweets, I promise!*

Not long after, Mitsuha and Mr. Zoltan arrived at the first building she'd chosen. *It's in a good location,* Mitsuha observed. *Being next to the main road means I'd have a good stream of customers, but it looks so cramped. Plus, I don't want* too *many customers. It'd wear me down. I'd be satisfied with modest clientele who only know about me thanks to good ol' word of mouth. My business model's gonna be "Big Profits, Slow Returns"...! Okay, doesn't sound great.*

Immediately upon seeing the second property, Mitsuha thought, *Does Mr. Zoltan think I'm some multi-millionaire? What would I even do with something this huge?! What, does he think I'm gonna turn it into an orphanage and have the children work for me? Does he take me for some philanthropic saint? Nope, that ain't me! I'll pass! Next!*

Mr. Zoltan brought her to the third building, which was a little off the main road. There weren't tons of people passing by, and the area had clearly seen better days. The place was a three-story brick building that had once housed an inn and restaurant. Like any such establishment, it also had a backyard, complete with a well. The room that used to be the dining hall would be a good place for Mitsuha to display her wares, while the kitchen had a drain, meaning

she could install a bath. All in all, it seemed perfectly suited to her needs. First too small, then too big, and then just right. That was a basic and reliable sales technique. Mr. Zoltan really knew how it was done.

"I'll take it!" she gushed, like a whimsical little girl buying some cheap candy. Not the most fitting tone, since it probably cost hundreds of gold coins.

Ah, that reminds me... I completely forgot to ask the price!

◇ ◇ ◇

"Welcome back, Milady!" a crowd of servants cried out in perfect unison.

"H-Hello..." Mitsuha replied, a little taken aback. Mr. Zoltan, on the other hand, was frozen still. She'd asked him to come with her to discuss the payment in Count Bozes' capital mansion, and upon their arrival they'd been greeted by the entourage of attendants.

Mr. Zoltan was sweating so profusely that Mitsuha felt a pang of guilt. *He might actually think I'm the count's daughter or something.* A maid led them to the reception room, where they met a man with a refined aura.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance. I am Rufus, a butler here," he said, though only directed his introduction toward Mr. Zoltan. Mitsuha wasn't sure why he'd excluded her, but chose to shrug it off. The butler then faced her and asked, "Milady, who is this man, if I may ask?"

"Oh, this is Mr. Lutz Zoltan, a real estate agent. I'm buying one of his properties for my shop."

"I see. Master Lutz, thank you for conducting business with our Lady Mitsuha."

"P-Please, there's no need for that!" Mr. Zoltan humbled himself.

During his one-on-one time with Mitsuha, Stefan had told her that the butlers of influential nobles were powerful enough to make short work of your everyday salesmen. He'd also told her about Rufus, saying, "Though quite young, he's not bad at all." However, he emphasized that Rufus should never hear of word of his compliments. Mitsuha didn't know why she'd been sworn to secrecy, but her guess was that it was a high form of praise among butlers.

“Oh, dear. Milady, your hair appears a bit unkempt,” Rufus noted. “Bertha, see to it that she looks her best!”

“Understood!” barked the maid in question.

H-Huuuh? But we were about to make a deal here, Mitsuha thought, but the maid dragged her out by the hand and sat her in a dressing room before she could protest. After enduring a good bout of combing, she was finally allowed to return to the reception room. *Huh? Uhh, why does Mr. Zoltan look like he’s about to die? Is he even breathing?*

“Ohh, Milady, welcome back. I see they did a wonderful job with your hair. You look marvelous. Now, where were we... The price, yes? What will you be charging, Mr. Zoltan?”

The salesman still looked deprived of most of his hit points. With desperation in his voice, he uttered, “T-Two hundred and eighty gold coins!”

Huh? That’s so cheap! What a steal! Mitsuha cheered internally. It was agreed that the Bozes’ household would pay Mr. Zoltan’s company directly. When Mitsuha requested money for renovations, she was granted twenty gold coins, raising the total expenses to three hundred. *What a nice number!*

Mitsuha saw Mr. Zoltan off in front of the mansion. He informed her that he’d write up the paperwork and send it at a later date, then gave her the key to the building. She was now free to enter and leave it as she pleased. Normally, she would’ve been wary of signing a contract without checking the documents first, but since Rufus and a great deal of other servants had witnessed the signing, she wasn’t worried in the least. It didn’t take a professional salesman to know what would happen if he broke the terms.

Boy, it’s great having a sponsor!

◇ ◇ ◇

“Hellooo!” Mitsuha called out. The response came almost immediately.

A moody, sinewy man—who could’ve been either middle-aged or elderly—poked out from behind a corner. “Yeh? Whaddya want?” he asked curtly.

Mitsuha had set foot in a carpenter’s workshop. After parting ways with Mr.

Zoltan, she'd tried to think of someone she could contract to do her renovations. Then, it had occurred to her: *Oh yeah, Mr. Zoltan's bound to know someone! We just split up, but I'm sure he won't mind if I bother him some more. I don't know too many people just yet, so I gotta use the little network I have!*

With that, she'd gone back to Japan, bought some high-quality Western sweets, and headed to Lutz Real Estate. The sweets, of course, were a souvenir for the girl. The offering had caught her off guard, but Mitsuha somehow persuaded her to accept it and call upon Mr. Zoltan.

"Could you please point me to someone who's good at what they do, has pride in their work, and is open-minded enough to try new things?" she'd asked him. He'd hesitated to help her, though she didn't know why. However, she hadn't backed down, and he'd eventually given in, though on the condition that she listened to one request.

"Erm, if I put you in contact with someone, might I ask you not to haggle their rates?"

"Huh? I would never. Trying to lower the cost of a craftsman is an insult to their craft. Good craftsmanship deserves proper compensation," she'd said, adding that she'd pay directly this time. After that, Mr. Zoltan had finally relaxed and pointed her to a reliable workman.

What was that all about, anyway? Mitsuha wondered. *Did haggling bring up bad memories or something?*

"I'd like you to build these for me, please!" she said, spreading out some documents on the table.

Kunz, the carpenter, looked at them in awe. "Wha... What inna world...?" The first source of his shock was the paper itself. It was thin, smooth, and resistant at the same time—surely a rarity in this country.

"W-Wait, this—!" His jaw dropped further when he saw the crisp detail of the images (which were photos) and foreign writing. The final blow was the furniture displayed in the pictures. Every piece was as novel as it was beautiful.

"This thing's a table?! And that's a... chest? And this here's..."

“Ah, I don’t need that one,” Mitsuha cut in, then gestured to the other items. “I need this, these shelves, and these display things. I’d also like defenses on my doors and windows. Like this, see? I’ll provide the metal parts myself. I’ll also need these stands for water tanks. You can see how they look in this phot—I mean, picture. See how big they are? I’d also like a bathroom installed near my kitchen. I’ll handle the water flow myself, so I just need you to divide the room. I’ll tell you more when we’re there, and—”

”...Takin’ it,” Kunz mumbled. His eyes were fixed on the dozens of sheets Mitsuha had printed off of her computer. He grasped them so tightly she thought he’d tear them.

“But we haven’t even discussed the paymen—”

“I said, I’m takin’ it. I’M TAKIN’ THIS JOB!”

Well, whatever. He’s motivated, and that’s good enough for me, Mitsuha thought.

“This paper’s stayin’ with me, though, ya hear?”

Huh? That’s what you wanted?

“Sure thing,” she agreed. “These are just samples, though. I’ll bring you something more detailed later. And if you want, I can even get you blueprints for furniture and stuff that’s got nothing to do with my order.” She felt she could allow him that much. Basic designs weren’t some futuristic alien technology. She’d leave the methods and durability completely in their hands, though.

“I’m gonna do it,” the craftsman declared. “I’ll catch up to these geniuses if it’s the last thing I do!”

Wow, he’s really fired up, huh?

Hey, remember when I said I wouldn’t bring anything along that might affect this world’s future? Well, I LIED! Just kiddin’, I wouldn’t sell anything like that, but no harm done if it’s just for me, right? There’s no problem with me using anything that doesn’t depend on me. Even if people stumbled upon the tech I have in mind, they couldn’t analyze it, let alone reverse engineer it. Plus, I really don’t wanna cut corners with security.

I also have to be careful about what I do end up putting on the market. It's gotta be something that wouldn't create problems if I suddenly vanished. Small luxuries, handy little tools... that sort of thing. People might be sad to see 'em go along with me, but it wouldn't cause any real trouble. Oh, and I don't wanna attract too much attention from powerful people. That'd make things complicated, especially if those "powerful people" included any big-shot merchants.

Oh, well. Whatever happens, happens. If things go sour, I can just try this again in a different country or do a really big sale and then dip outta here. Not that it's ideal. If possible, I want to make a fortune at a comfortable pace, having fun with everyone involved. Huh? It'll never be that smooth? Okay...

At any rate, it was time for Mitsuha to gather some things and put the next phase of her plan in action. Where from, you ask? Her home back on Earth. Normally, she would've been glad to return, but she felt the whole ordeal was just draining. *Huh. I just realized you can't spell "draining" without "raining",* she mused. *That's kinda ironic.* Nonsense aside, her family's car had passed on along with them, and so the Yamanos' parking space was always open. Mitsuha was now using it for deliveries, so it was being occupied by a steady stream of shipments from home improvement stores, emporiums, online retailers, et cetera.

Mitsuha had contracted a fuel salesman for six large propane tanks. She split them up into three groups of two, hooking some up to dummy pipes outside her home to make it seem like they were in use. Six propane tanks were a bit too much for the average home, but she'd convinced the salesman she needed them to power her through her new stay-at-home job. She'd known him for a long time, though, so he was probably being a bit lenient with her.

She would use propane for the oven, stove, and bath in her store, but had a different reason for using two tanks of this size at a time—electricity. It was the backbone of modern life, and a propane generator was the best method for her to get it in the other world. In reality, the extra propane tanks were spares for her to bring to the capital whenever one ran out.

Gasoline and diesel generators had lots of problems: they were loud, hard to refill, bad for the environment, used dangerous fuel, and could cause some

concern if they ran for too long. They couldn't even compare to propane generators.

Of course, Mitsuha didn't neglect to install solar panels and a big battery, as well as an electrical energy control system. The latter was basically a switchboard to help her manage her multiple methods of generating and storing electricity.

She'd had the solar panels installed on the rooftop so they wouldn't stand out. The flat, open rooftop—as opposed to a regular peaked roof—was another good thing about the brick building she'd bought. The previous owners had used it to hang their laundry.

For entertainment, Mitsuha brought along an LED TV that didn't require too much power, as well as several game consoles. *I mean, I'm gonna be spending a lot of my time in the other world, so I'm gonna need this to watch the stuff in my backlog and play video games. A girl's gotta have a way to unwind on slow days.*

She took metal window bars, along with some other security equipment, and jump-carried—or just "transferred"—them to the other world. The wares she'd be selling would stay at home for a while longer. She'd gone shopping at discount stores and loaded up on all kinds of cheap, useful items. A whole bunch of them would go for several silver coins—thousands of yen—each. Others were probably worth a small gold coin apiece. It was a real pile of treasure.

Mitsuha also crafted hiding spots to stash her earnings: one at home and one in the shop. She called them "deep pockets". Since the area around the shop wasn't all that peaceful, and because she was often away from home, she needed safe places to keep her money. Making them was a breeze. First, she acquired a large plastic container and a twenty-foot-long PVC pipe.

Next, she opened up the floor and jumped between worlds, all the while picturing the dirt below in the shape of a twenty-foot-deep hole with an open space at the bottom. In the other world, she appeared alongside a chunk of dirt with a very tall dirt cylinder sticking out of it. Then, she jumped back with the container and the pipe, making sure they appeared in the hole she'd created—

with the container at the bottom, of course—and voilà. Success!

She'd thought of it while running through the internal "instruction manual" given to her by the formless being alongside her healing powers. While her power couldn't be used to transfer *just* an object, she could bring things with her if she concentrated on them. She didn't even have to touch them directly, which made sense. If she *did* have to touch everything she wanted to transfer, she'd be showing up at the end of a jump in just her underwear and shirt, leaving any coats, skirts, shoes, and items in her pockets behind. What a tragedy that would've been. At this point, she'd experimented with her powers enough to understand the process.

When these safes get pretty full, I'm gonna really savor the sound the coins make as I toss them down the pipe! she thought happily.

Stealing her stock of gold would require knowledge of the "deep pockets", digging a twenty-foot hole without anyone noticing, then lifting up the gold from that depth without using any heavy machinery—it wouldn't fit inside the house, after all. The noise, the handling of the unearthed dirt, the danger of people walking by, time limits... It was impossible for everyone but Mitsuha, really. She could simply transfer it out.

Even if someone did discover the pipes, they'd have no idea they were twenty feet deep and housed a trove of gold at the bottom. And if Mitsuha somehow lost her world-jumping ability, she could just hire some people to dig it up for her. If she didn't have to hide the work or do it within a time limit, she'd be reunited with her coins in a couple of days. Both worlds were advanced enough to have well-digging, at least.

She also attended driving school, since she only had a scooter license. Obviously she didn't need a license or registration to use a car in the other world, but they'd be required to buy one on Earth, as well as for maintenance and oil changes. All in all, it was a worthwhile investment. As things were, Mitsuha had no plans to drive Scooty or a car in the other world. They'd make her stand out too much. She planned to use them mostly for shopping trips in Japan, though was open to making an exception if the situation called for it.

The renovators ran into problems every now and again, but they were making

decent progress. While they were occupied, Mitsuha took the opportunity to transfer her wares to the second floor. She planned to set up security systems for this level later on. She chose the third floor for her personal quarters, a move that prioritized security over convenience.

She stored a rope ladder and other evacuation tools on the rooftop and planned to store a backpack full of emergency supplies elsewhere. These were all preparations in case she hired any employees. If the place experienced a raid or similar assault and she couldn't jump because of them, she'd need a reliable alternative. Mitsuha was a cautious, cowardly worrywart to the core. She'd take that claim to her grave, even if her peers unanimously disagreed.

After her shop preparations, Mitsuha jumped to the mercenary base and hurried off to ask the captain what she'd been dying to know.

"Hello, Captain! So, did you check the value?"

"Man, it always feels like you just pop outta nowhere... Yeah, we had it appraised. The purity's ninety percent. Each one's worth about two hundred an' thirty dollars on today's market, includin' fees."

230 dollars... That's about 25,000 yen, Mitsuha thought. *That's way less than I expected. Plus, it messes up my calculations.* From the prices of food and board, Mitsuha had estimated a coin's worth to be at least 100,000. *Ah, wait. I wasn't wrong—it's just that the people on Earth put different values on things. Earthlings have lots of expenses—taxes, rent, electricity, gas, water, cars, entertainment, clothing, food, education, neighborhood associations, and so on.*

The people from the other world have way less. People with homes pay taxes, then there's food, clothes, firewood, and... booze, maybe? Anyway, they don't have to pay for nearly as much stuff as people on Earth. Though they do have smaller incomes... If the monthly income for a family of four is two gold coins, then yes, one gold coin would be worth 100,000 yen. But the exchange rate between that and Earth's money is 25,000 yen. That's all there is to it.

To compare commodity prices between the worlds was foolish. In the other world, crops were way cheaper, while things like clothes, tableware, rare ingredients, and luxury goods were absurdly expensive. The standards varied wildly depending on what you compared. In the end, such comparisons were

meaningless, and Mitsuha could only really say how much she would need to live on one side and how much on the other.

So, since I'd need one billion yen to live in Japan till I'm a hundred, that'd be 40,000 gold coins. As for the other world... if I wanted to live eating good food, wearing comfortable clothes, staying up late, and buying the newest household goods—a standard life in Japan, but livin' large over there—I'd also need 40,000 gold coins, for a total of 80,000. That's my final goal... I'll save up those 80,000 gold coins and have a peaceful and happy retirement!

The End

Please keep an eye out for Miss Mitsuha's other works!

...YEAH, RIGHT!

Anyway, I'll assume that in the other world, a gold coin is worth 100,000 yen, a small gold coin is about 10,000, a silver coin is a thousand, and a small silver coin is a hundred. And since one gold is worth 25,000 yen on Earth, I have to draw a line between how I think about money here and there.

I'll have to set my prices pretty high, but I don't really have a choice. If my stuff's too cheap, it'll just fly off the shelves and I won't get a second to breathe. Not to mention how much that would affect the world. But I also don't want my goods to cost an arm and a leg. I'm sure I'd still get people willing to pay for them, so it'd be a quick and easy way to strike it rich, but Mitsuha's General Store isn't about that!

If I wanted to do something along those lines, I'd go around the world selling pearls and artificial gems at insane prices. Then I could put on a disguise, change my name, hire some people, and quickly rack up enough money to live a comfortable life. I won't do that, though. You wanna know why?

That'd be way too boring! Life isn't all about making money. You just need enough to make it fun. Not having enough is hard, so "enough" is all I need. But what would be the point if I didn't have fun getting there? The real gold is the friends you make along the way... or something. Anyway, if I can, I want to get the money at a leisurely pace. And luckily, my power makes that real easy. I'm gonna share its blessings and have a good time doing it! But if that gets me some enemies, I'll just have to crush them. I can't let anyone threaten that

happiness.

"Ya done?" the captain asked abruptly.

"Huh? With what?" Mitsuha was jerked back to the present.

"Daydreamin'. It really dragged on this time, too."

Oops... Sorry!

"Anyway, let's go."

"Comiiing!"

Today was assault rifle practice. Mitsuha had long since given up on grenades, by the way. Her throws had always somehow brought them closer, not farther away, so the people training her banned her from touching them. *I'll have to make do with RPGs or something.*

Please keep an eye out for Miss Mitsuha's next work, "RPG-22"!

Stop! That joke's DOA!

CHAPTER 7: MITSUHA'S GENERAL STORE AT LAST, IT WAS TIME FOR MITSUHA TO OPEN FOR BUSINESS. THE RENOVATIONS HAD GONE OFF WITHOUT A HITCH. THE STORE'S INTERIOR HAD EVERYTHING SHE NEEDED, INCLUDING SHELVES, CURTAINS, AND LIGHTING. HER WARES WERE ALL IN PLACE, PRICED, AND DESCRIBED IN DETAIL. DURING BUSINESS HOURS, HER SECURITY SYSTEM WOULD BE SET TO "OFF". MITSUHA'S LIVING SPACE WAS READY FOR OCCUPANCY, TOO.

The propane generator chugged along, helping to provide the place with electricity. The solar energy company had insisted on installing the panels themselves, but Mitsuha claimed she'd be using them on a faraway island and needed only to know how to install them herself. With the help of Kunz and his workers, setting them up had been a breeze.

The bathroom had also been surprisingly easy to build. The kitchen already had a drain, so it was just a matter of building a wooden divider and putting the bathtub in place. Even setting up a steady supply of hot water had proved to be

quick work for the carpenters. Mitsuha was truly impressed. *This stuff is basically alien to them, but with a blueprint and a little explanation, they got it all done perfectly. Craftsmen are awesome!*

Once all that finished, Mitsuha had gone around handing out free towel sets to both her next-door neighbors and the three households on the opposite side of the road. They'd found such a young girl running a store just as impressive as the fluffiness of the towels. Always keen to make a sale, Mitsuha hadn't forgotten to mention they'd be available at her store.

She'd also gone home and printed several dozen leaflets off her computer. When she returned, she'd hung them outside her favorite restaurants, Mr. Zoltan's agency, and a few other places. She'd written the letters by hand using her mouse. The result was messy, but a little endearing. Anyway, all was in order, and the day of the grand opening had arrived.

Giddy with enthusiasm, she sat behind the counter, where she could keep an eye on the whole sales floor. She'd open at Japan's equivalent of ten o'clock, and close up at four. There'd be no breaks for lunch, so she planned her meals: she would eat a filling brunch before opening each day, then enjoy a lavish dinner shortly after closing. *Late dinners make you gain weight more quickly,* she rationalized. *Though maybe I need some more meat on me... in certain places... Wait, no, shut up!* Mitsuha was also the sole staff member, so if nature called, she'd have to wait until there were no customers to hang up a "Be back soon!" sign. If there was no end to them, however, she'd just have to hold it.

All right, everyone! she announced in her mind. *Mitsuha's General Store is now open!*

Okay, it's eleven o'clock now. Not a single customer so far... Well, it's only day one, so word probably hasn't gotten around yet. And besides, these are work hours. Maybe I'll get some people in when it's time for lunch?

One o'clock, still no customers.

Three o'clock, still no customers.

Four o'clock, still no customers... and it was time to close. Mitsuha collapsed on the counter. *Well, a-again, it's just day one! And it's not like I'm running a supermarket with all the newspaper ads and opening promos and whatnot!*

The pattern only repeated itself on the second day.

Eleven o’clock, still no customers.

One o’clock, still no customers.

Three o’clock, still no customers.



Four o’clock, still no customers... and it was time to close. Mitsuha collapsed

on the counter again. *Do I have to extend my opening hours so I catch everyone on their way home from work? No, that's unacceptable! I mean, I'd have to work even more! That simply can't happen! But what else can I do? Hrm... I just started and I'm already in a pickle... I'll think of a new strategy if the same thing happens tomorrow.*

Day three.

Eleven o'clock, still no customers.

One o'clock, still no customers.

Three o'clock, still no customers.

Lord Almighty, please help me!

Ding-a-ling!

FINALLY! Mitsuha thought in relief.

"WELCOOOME!" She gleefully greeted her first customers: a trio of girls in plain, yet well-maintained clothes.

"This place is new, isn't it?" one of them asked.

"Yes, ma'am! Opened just two days ago! Look around! Take your time!" *Keep it cool, Mitsuha! They'll leave if you're too pushy,* she thought, making an effort to calm herself. On the outside, at least; her heart drummed wildly as she watched them walk around. They wandered over to a section for handy household tools.

"Huh, what's this? A 'fish scale remover'?" said one of the girls, looking perplexed.

"Absolutely! It makes scale removal into a real cakewalk. Preparing a fish dinner has never been easier!" Mitsuha tried to upsell the product, but...

"F-Fish?"

"You take off the scales?"

They sounded even more puzzled. *Huh? What's so weird about it?* she wondered. But the girls paid no mind to her confusion, and merely exchanged glances before browsing another shelf. Cooking utensils, flashlights, clocks,

writing supplies... A lot of things seemed to interest them, but Mitsuha could tell they had no intention of buying any. As made their way over to the cute accessory corner, Mitsuha prayed, *Don't fail me now... Damn it! It did! Next, there's the...*

Just as Mitsuha was clenching her teeth, the girls stopped.

"'Shampoo'...?" A member of the trio tilted her head.

All right, now we're in business!

"Yes!" Mitsuha jumped at the chance. "That's a magical liquid that cleans, repairs, and moisturizes your hair! A must-have for every girl!" This world did have bars of soap, but they were primitive, ineffective, lacked a pleasant aroma, and cost so much that only nobles and other wealthy people could afford them. Melting the bars down was all they could do to wash their hair, and that was too much of a luxury for your typical commoner. *That's where my one-of-a-kind, limited-edition product comes in: a big ol' pump bottle of liquid shampoo!*

"But eight silver is too much," murmured one of the girls.

Mitsuha agreed, to some extent. After all, this was a world where a one-night stay at the average inn, meals included, cost four or five silver. But the shampoo before them was leagues ahead of any soap on the market, so there had to be a fair price. When Mitsuha was staying with the Bozes, Beatrice had complained about how her soap was flimsy and ran out too quickly. *Ooh, I should give her some of this as a gift,* she thought, then addressed the girl who seemed most interested.

"I highly recommend you get it, miss. A single bottle can be used dozens of times! Considering how beautiful and silky your hair will become... it's quite a steal."

"D-Dozens of times?!"

If I had to guess, I'd say they're servants or something like that. They must not have much time for personal grooming, but they're not allowed to look bad, either. None of them have long hair, probably to make care and styling quick and easy. That means they'd get even more uses out of the bottle. Plus, they wouldn't have to waste time melting down soap.

“Yes! I swear it on my store’s reputation!” Mitsuha declared. The girls chatted amongst themselves for a moment, then the girl with the bottle in hand reached to put it back on the... *OH NO!*

“P-Please wait! Would you like a demonstration? I’ll show you what it can do! For free!”

The girls looked at one another. “What d’you think?” one of them asked.

“I’m curious, but it’s already this late...”

“Yeah, we don’t get many half days. We said we’d go get some good food this time.”

Meanwhile, Mitsuha was screaming on the inside. *I waited for my first customers for TWO DAYS and now they’re slipping away from me! I’m at my wits’ end... I feel like I’m gonna be ruined if I let them go. I’ve gotta to do everything I can to keep them here!*

“W-Wait!” she called out to them. “I’ll also cook you up a meal. I guarantee it’ll be delicious! Nothing else in this town will compare. And it’ll be free! So please, try my products!” The girls probably pitied her a little upon seeing her sheer desperation. You could see in their expressions that they found it hard to refuse. Finally, one of them spoke up. “Okay... I’ll try it.”

Yay! Mitsuha cheered. *Looking like a kid was useful for once!*

“Right this way, please!”

She put a sign out front to deter any walk-ins, locked the door, and led the girls through the kitchen. After instructing her volunteer to strip, Mitsuha undressed to her underwear, activated the hot water systems, turned on the shower, and made sure it was just the right temperature.

“Huh? Wh-What’s that?! Thin streams of... hot water? What’s going on?!” The now-nude girl, Anke, couldn’t withhold her surprise.

The other two were peeking inside, eyes wide.

“Please sit right here,” Mitsuha told her.

Still in shock, she listened and sat down on the bathroom chair.

“Eep!” she exclaimed as the water hit her head, but her alarm soon melted into enjoyment. Baths were a luxury for this world’s commoners. At best, their hygiene routine consisted of scrubbing themselves with towels soaked in wash bowls, then wringing the towels and wiping their hair with them. This poor cleansing process was the cause of most commoners’ oily sheen.

Showering under a flow of warm water like this was rare even for noble girls. *Time for the baptism,* Mitsuha thought. The shampoo also functioned as a conditioner. Mitsuha used a 2-in-1 herself and couldn’t be bothered to buy separate products. The entire Yamano family had always used the same 2-in-1 women’s shampoo. Getting her own had seemed like a waste of time and money. Her father and Tsuyoshi thought the same, so all four Yamanos had lathered up from a single bottle.

Now, back to the matter at hand. Mitsuha stopped the shower, dispensed some shampoo, and prepared to wash Anke’s hair. Not wasting any more time, she began rubbing the girl’s head. *Uh-oh, she’s so dirty that it’s not foaming up.* Mitsuha rinsed her again, then got back to rubbing. *Agh! Still no foam! Third time’s the charm.* She rinsed once more, rubbed, and... *Eureka!*

“I’m sorry,” she said. “Usually, just one use does the trick, but you were so dirty that I had to do it three times.” Mitsuha’s bluntness caused Anke’s eyes to well up with tears.

“Oops! I-I’m so sorry!” Mitsuha cried hastily. “Let me make it up to you with a free trial of body wash!” She rinsed the girl again, then scrambled off to fetch it. Mitsuha had no plans to turn her general store into some sort of foamy massage parlor, however, so she simply put some into Anke’s hands and told her to wash herself.

“Wh-Whoa! Mmm, it smells so nice!”

Once the demonstration was over, Mitsuha handed a bath towel to the volunteer. She lightly dabbed herself off before taking out a blow-dryer. As Anke gushed over how soft the towel was, Mitsuha flicked the dryer on from behind her.

“AAAHHH!” She first let out a scream, then relaxed as she found it not only harmless, but extremely soothing.

“Seriously, what is this place? It’s amazing...” mumbled one of the other two, who were still watching. Their names were Britta and Carla, and they looked utterly flabbergasted.

Soon after, the three of them stood in front of Mitsuha’s wares, clearly at a loss. They all coveted the shampoo, but didn’t want to pass on the body wash, either. Both were priced at eight silver, but each girl had only twelve, nine, or ten. Even the wealthiest among them could only buy one product.

Perceptive as ever, Mitsuha saw their dilemma and proposed a solution. “How about you all throw in eight silver apiece, buy one of each, and then share them among yourselves?”

“Huh? But that’s eight silver too much.” Britta raised an eyebrow.

Mitsuha beamed and presented them with a velvet box a little under a foot long on each side. Inside, there were shiny rings, bracelets, necklaces, brooches, and other trinkets.

“Each of these is eight silver, too!” Their eyes glittered. *Now this is how you do business,* Mitsuha thought.

“Please wait here,” she said, guiding them to a dining table in the corner of the kitchen. She then moved to a large pot on the stove. Mitsuha had prepared the table to welcome future guests, but the opportunity had come much sooner than she’d expected. The renovations had really spruced up the once-plain kitchen, setting the mood for a pleasant meal. She’d turned on the gas range before the shampoo affair, so the water had been boiling for some time.

Once Mitsuha moved away from the group, the three girls started whispering among themselves.

“What’s that? Fire?” asked Anke.

“Anke, you’ve been saying nothing but ‘what’s this’, ‘what’s that’ ever since she started washing you,” Carla said.

“Well, what else am I supposed to say?”

“Look at your hair, though... Ugh, I messed up! I should’ve volunteered instead.”

“You’ll get to use it too, Carla.”

“Oh, look! That girl’s hair is really smooth, too. I should’ve known this ‘shampoo’ stuff was good when I saw that shine.”

“Yeah. We had this in one of our lessons,” Britta joined in. “‘Noble servants must make quick judgments based off what they know from their surroundings.’“

“Wow, Britta. You remember that?”

“You’re probably the only one who doesn’t.”

As they chatted away, Mitsuha brought the first dish. She’d been obscenely fast—only a few minutes had passed since she’d walked to the stove.

“Our first course is a soup called ‘minestrone’.”

“Huh? You made soup that fast?” said Anke. They were surprised and somewhat hesitant to eat it, but their hunger and curiosity got the better of them.

“It’s delicious!”

The praise could’ve easily come from any one of them. The soup’s taste was so strong and profound that they couldn’t believe some little girl had whipped it up in just a few minutes. It was even better than the meals they had in the mansion where they worked. Their amazement did nothing to deter their hunger, however, and by the time they’d voraciously cleaned their plates, a new dish was being placed in front of them.

How is she so fast? She only just decided she’d make food for us! they wondered as Mitsuha laid down the plates.

“Boiled white radish and amberjack—a fish from the sea,” she declared.

“Huh?! F-FISH?!”

“Yes, what about it?”

“N-Nothing! Nothing at all!” Britta waved her hands.

Mitsuha wasn’t sure what to make of their reaction. *Doesn’t seem like nothing... What’s with these girls and fish? Is it a taboo or something? Did I*

mess up? Well, they're eating, so it's probably fine. She felt her worries dissipate as she watched them dig in. *Good to see they liked the canned soup and boil-in-the-bag amberjack. Let's move on to the next dish!*

Mitsuha brought out one course after another. "This is roast beef. Dip it in that sauce before eating." *That one was supposed to be for me. Sure, it's just a cheap TV dinner, but I really like it! Hnngh...* She lamented the sacrifice but figured her job was more important.

"Here's another beef dish for you," she said, "but this time, it's boiled."

The beef was nicely spiced and came in tin cans. Mitsuha had needed to open six of them, as a single serving wasn't nearly enough.

"Please give this risotto a try!" The risotto was also a boil-in-the-bag product. She'd cooked and assembled two of them for the girls.

When Mitsuha went back to prepare more food, Carla whispered, "Hey, is it just me, or is all the food coming from that... cauldron?"

"AHHH! Don't say that! I was trying to ignore it!" said Britta, looking a bit pale.

"It's okay, she's a good witch. She has to be," Anke mumbled to herself.

Mitsuha's culinary assault was going full steam ahead.

"This is beef stew." Just one more boil-in-the-bag from the discount store.

"And last but not least, your dessert: ice cream."

It was a Chateraise popsicle six-pack, to be precise. The dessert brand was known for its high quality and low price, so it was perfect for her needs. Mitsuha had taken them out of the fridge, removed the sticks, put them in glasses, and served them with spoons. A single bite was enough for the girls to lose it.

"What is this?! It's so cold! So sweet! So good!"

"I-It's... unbelievable!"

One was so dumbfounded she didn't say a word.

"We'll top it off with a little amazake," she said. "A warm drink is perfect after a cold dessert." It was a freeze-dried sweet sake you could prepare by simply

adding hot water. Easy, delicious, cheap, long-lasting, and maybe even good for you, it was one of Mitsuha's favorites.

"Did you enjoy the food?" she asked, all smiles. Their lunch had finally come to an end.

The three girls nodded. "Y-Yes. You weren't lying... That was the best meal I've ever had."

"Umm, i-is that cauldron a—OUCH!" Carla's question was cut short by Anke and Britta discreetly stepping on her feet.

"Thank you for everything," said Anke as they prepared to leave.

"Ah, please wait a moment." Mitsuha held them back. "Here's a little something to share with your coworkers, friends, or family! Just make sure to take off the wrappers before eating!" She handed them a thin, see-through, and strangely lightweight jar full of what looked like silver and gold eggs.

"O-Okay..." Britta replied meekly. With that, the three left, cradling their purchases and the container of foil-wrapped chocolate almonds.

Mitsuha celebrated immediately after their departure. *Yes! I got my first customers and made my first sale! It cost me a few of my ready-made meals, but that sale made it totally worth it. It kinda worried me that I didn't have much variety and kept giving them beef, but the flavors were so different that they didn't even care. I did have to use multiples of each, though... Not a single pack or can had enough. Now, if they'd go and spread the word, my store could explode in popularity!*

Ah, but I'm not sure if I want too *much business. If I'm too busy, I won't have time to go to the bathroom! Teehee!*

"Well?" Anke asked not long after they'd left.

"Well..." said Carla.

"What if these have some weird bugs inside them? When you eat them, they crawl into your brain and take control of your—"

"DON'T SAY THAAAT!" Britta cried.

"Well?" Anke asked again.

“Well...”

“I feel like if we don’t do as she said, something bad’s going to happen.”

“What d’you mean, Britta?”

“Let’s hand them out, like she told us.”

“B-But then everyone else will—”

“It should be fine as long as we follow her instructions. We’ll hand these over to Marcel, put on our most serious faces, and tell him they came from a stranger. We wouldn’t be lying, but we also wouldn’t be going against what she told us to do. That’s ‘sharing it with a coworker’, right? Besides, Marcel is our head chef! He’ll know if there’s something weird about them!”

Anke with her silky hair, Britta with a shiny new brooch on her chest, and Carla, holding the chocolate almonds, nodded in agreement. They hoped Marcel would understand them as they returned to the mansion.

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“Whoa!” Marcel exclaimed. Of course, anyone would’ve done the same if approached by three women making such frightening faces. *Did I do something wrong?!*

“We got this from a stranger!” one of them said, pushing something foreign his way. “She said you’ve got to take off the wrapper and eat them.”

So it’s food, is it? Marcel wasn’t brave enough to refuse them or flee the scene. He opened the container, fearfully reached inside, and took out one of the objects. Then, after glaring at it for a while, he removed the wrapper.

“It’s brown,” he said. “Smells rich and sweet...” The scent was new to him. Intrigued, he sniffed it, stared at it from all sides. He’d never seen anything like it before. Eventually, he gave it a lick.

“EEK!” the girls screamed in unison.

“Why are you all screaming?!” he snapped, then leaned in to take a bite.

“AHH! He ate it! He actually ate it!”

“What’s wrong with you three? Wait, what is this?! Bitter? Sweet? This

texture, the smell, the taste... It's one of a kind! Where did you get th—"

Marcel was interrupted by a voice from behind. "You're all so noisy. What's this about?"

"M-Madam..." They humbled themselves.

A short while later, the group was seated around a table in the lounge. Now present were the owners of the mansion, Viscount Matheus von Ryner and his wife, Amalia, who had spoken up earlier. Besides these two, there was the Ryners' head chef—Marcel—and the three girls, making a total of six.

The Ryners were new to nobility, having only reached their status in the last generation. Because of this, there wasn't much of a social barrier between them and their servants, and they had nothing against conversing as equals. They didn't even mind when the staff got carried away and their proper etiquette went out the window.

"So, you're saying she gave this to you?" the lady asked.

"Y-Yes..."

"What do you think, dear?"

Viscount Ryner tilted his head at his wife's question. "Hmm... And you think this girl was a witch?"

"She's a good witch! She has to be!" Anke blurted. "At least, I think so." She was undoubtedly pleased with her smooth hair.

"Are you sure that was fresh fish she gave you? Not dried, smoked, or pickled?" asked Marcel, still doubtful.

"Yes," said Britta. "When I was a little girl, I went to a seaside village and had some fresh fish. Hers tasted just like it. The other food was delicious, too!"

Carla nodded in agreement. Marcel somehow felt they'd just snubbed his cooking, and his shoulders drooped a little.

Matheus shook his head. "I can't say I believe that. The closest fishing village is a ten-day journey by wagon. Even a stagecoach would take at least a week.

"Let's say you had a sturdy, lightweight cart, took a small load, and constantly

swapped out the horse and driver. If it didn't make a single stop, it'd still take at least three days. Not to mention that this method would make fish into a true luxury. Think dozens of silver each.

"And it would only work in winter, when you have snow and ice to keep it cold. It's impossible at this time of year! Boiling the fish and keeping it hot on the way back is out of the question, too. It'd take too much time, and you'd overcook it. It wouldn't even be edible."

Marcel nodded. Of course a chef would know these sorts of things.

"Though I suppose there's no point in overthinking it."

As the conversation reached a dead end, Amalia changed the subject. "By the way, Anke. Your hair is silky and you smell nice because...?"

"Oh, yes! It's all thanks to those magic mixtures we told you about."

"Magic, you say? Let me use them."

"Huh?" The three girls gaped at her. Amalia had long hair, so she'd use up quite a bit of their precious products.

"I'll pay for them! Sixteen silver is nothing to me! I'll even give them back to you after one use!" she cried, and the girls had nothing against those conditions. Although, being her servants, they couldn't refuse even if they wanted to.

"And Britta, about that brooch...?"

"Oh, it's what I bought with my eight silver."

"That's far too cheap for something of that quality!"

"She said it's because it's man-made."

"Of course it's man-made. It's a brooch! Are you saying God made all the others?"

"That's not what I meant. This gem-like thing here isn't real; it was made by people."

"A fake? This?!" Amalia couldn't believe it, but she also wondered why the so-called witch would admit to selling fake goods. There was no merit in doing so

—quite the opposite, in fact.

“Well, it doesn’t cost anything to make it with magic...” Carla muttered under her breath.

“Master Ryner,” Marcel faced the viscount. “With a power like this, acquiring rare ingredients and recipes would be simple!”

“Indeed. It might be wise to ask her for help. I leave it to you, Marcel.”

“Understood, sir!” The chef bowed his head and left.

Chapter 8: Debutante

On the fourth day of business, at a quarter after ten in the morning, Mitsuha's bell rang.

Ding-a-ling!

Yay! A customer right after opening!

She greeted her guest with a smile. "Welcome!"

The man who'd entered gave a curt nod, then walked around the store. He was chubby and looked to be in his thirties. *For someone so young, his belly's pretty massive,* Mitsuha thought. *He's either a big shot or a big eater who ain't too "big" on exercise.*

After getting a grasp of the store's layout, the man headed to the kitchenware section. He examined a fish scale remover with a curious expression but put it back immediately afterwards. When he saw the next object of interest—a kitchen knife—his eyes widened. The price, however, caused him to deflate a little.

That knife's one of the best things I've got for sale. I shelled out a whole 58,000 yen on it, and here I am only selling it for two gold and five small gold... Knowing the cross-world exchange rates, I'll barely make any money.

Well, it's less of a product and more of a statement, anyway. "Look! We know fancy! We have high-quality goods!" and all that. I wouldn't care if I broke even with that one. I saw a show once on how those are made. Each one is painstakingly forged by hand. It was some great TV... Really moved me!

Mitsuha watched as he took the knife and moved on to another product. *Wait, huh? He's buying it?! Nice! He's got an eye for quality! That makes me kinda happy, even if I won't get much from it.*

Before long, the man brought a pile of merchandise to the counter. "Pardon me," he said. "I have a few questions."

Oh? Not checking out yet, are we?

“Ask away! And feel free to use that shopping basket.”

Likely never having seen such a thing, he placed his items into the topmost basket with a bewildered expression.

“First, I want to ask about that scale remover. Why are you selling it?”

Huh? Is there a problem with that?

“Uhh, because it’s useful?” she said, puzzled. “It turns scale removal into a real cakewalk, so it’s a great gift for housewives...”

The shock on his face was clear. “Little lady, do you have any idea how far we are from the sea? All the fish here is either dried, pickled, or smoked. None of them need the scales removed!”

Oh no! I messed up! It doesn’t belong here! So that’s why the girls were so weirded out...

“I’d also like to know how to use these,” he said, pointing to the basket.

Oh, so he’s not actually buying yet. What a shame. And hey, there’s almost nothing but cooking supplies in there... He’s gotta be a chef or something.

“Certainly,” she began. “This here’s a peeler—the name says it all. You use it like this. It makes peeling so easy, even a child can do it! Frankly, it’s unfair to the experienced cooks.”

Stupefied, the man could only listen.

“This is an hourglass. When you turn it upside-down, sand falls to the bottom. Always takes the same amount of time to run out. It helps when you need to know how long you’ve been boiling something. I have them in several sizes, including three, five, and ten minutes.

“Ah, this one’s a can opener. It opens ‘cans’, which are storage containers that preserve food for years. You can eat right out of them, too. You’ll find some canned foods over there.”

Most cans these days didn’t need an opener, but the discount store Mitsuha had bought hers from mostly supplied those that did. She’d also felt that opener-dependent cans were the first logical step in introducing them to this world.

The more she explained, the more a flush spread across his face. At last, the man spoke up. “Please tell me about this. Why is it so expensive?”

He placed the knife on the counter.

“Ah, because it’s not some child’s toy,” she said, sensing an opportunity to upsell. “It wasn’t made by just pouring molten iron into a mold.”

“What?” The man gave a disgruntled look, perhaps feeling a little challenged by her tone.

“It’s a masterpiece crafted over countless days by several men—no, demons—who spent decades perfecting the art of forging kitchen knives! It’s both an instrument and a work of art! It’s the ultimate achievement of the ‘Steel Demons’!”

“S-Steel Demons...” he gulped.

“See here? It was folded over and over. The union between soft and hard steel made it bind with such perfection. This miraculous feat gave birth to a knife that’s both sharp and sturdy!”

His hands, which held the blade, were shaking.

Mitsuha continued, “Honestly, I won’t gain any profit by selling it, but it’s our duty as merchants to pass on such masterpieces from the craftsmen to the chefs. If it’s too cheap, the makers can’t earn a living, but if it’s too expensive, the chefs won’t be able to afford it. This is a case where we should sacrifice ourselves for the greater good. Don’t you agree?”

“I-I’LL TAKE IT!” the man shouted, tears flowing out of his eyes.

Thank you very much!

After recovering his composure, he spoke up again. “By the way, I’d like to speak with the shopkeeper. May I?”

“Uh, sure, go ahead,” she said.

“Then... could you call them for me?”

“Uh, like I said, go ahead. Let’s talk.”

“O-Ohh, I see. Young as you might be, you’re the only one at the counter, so I

guess that makes you the shopkeeper. But that's not what I meant. I wish to talk to the owner of this place. The manager, not an employee."

Well, I can't really blame him for that, she thought with a shrug.

"Sir, this store *is* mine. I bought it, remodeled it, and stocked the shelves. I'm both the owner and a shopkeeper!" She was, essentially, the retail version of a restaurateur.

After taking the time to process her answer, he said, "Very well, then... Do you sell fresh fish?"

So that's why he's here. Do the three girls have something to do with this?

"What gave you that idea?"

"Because Anke's trio told us."

"Who's that?"

"The three girls who were here yesterday."

Ah, so it was them. I totally blanked on their names. But man, they actually advertised me! A-thank youuu! Anyway...

"Oh, those three? They were my first customers, so I pampered them a bit. It got me in the red, haha..."

"I see. They really raved about your wares and the food," the man said.

Uh-huh, of course they did! Keep it up, girls! Also, notice how I said it was a special case? Now I've made it clear that kinda service is usually more expensive. I'm so good at this!

"So, why the interest in fish? From what you've told me, it's not a hot commodity here..."

The man then began telling her about his circumstances. His name was Marcel. He was the head chef for Viscount Ryner, the same man who employed Anke and her crew. At just thirty-six years old, Marcel was a bit young for his role but had the skills and confidence he needed to succeed.

Until recently, he'd worked as second-in-command to an aging chef. His superior had suddenly become ill, so he retired and moved to a countryside

town to live with his daughter's family. It had been an abrupt change, though not entirely unsurprising. As a result, Marcel had been promoted to head chef—an enviable position for someone his age.

Soon after, however, they were faced with a major obstacle: the coming-of-age of the Ryners' daughter, Lady Adelaide. When noble ladies turned fifteen, they had to make a public debut into high society. This event also doubled as a birthday party and would be held by each noble family during the first ballroom season after their girl's birthday.

The debutante balls greatly influenced the girls' futures and positions in high society, so families spared no expense on them. From the dress to the food, everything had to be perfect. The money spent could easily reach twice the wealth of one commoner family, all for a single night.

If the previous head chef were still in charge, everything would have gone smoothly. The man was a veteran who'd worked in noble kitchens his entire life. But he was retired now, and though Marcel was skilled—likely one of the best in his class—he had almost no experience with such parties.

During the Ryners' previous, smaller affairs, Marcel had stuck to following the head chef's orders, so he hadn't had a chance to learn proper menu composition, timing, or improvisation. The old man had planned to teach him these things during Adelaide's debut, but his sudden illness made it impossible.

Pre-debut birthday parties were never too fancy, so this would be the biggest party at the Ryner mansion since the current viscount's wedding. And since the Ryners were relatively "new money", they were already scorned by the other families. Failure wasn't an option, as it would only make things worse. Adelaide would be a laughingstock, and the family name would be disgraced forever.

"But I don't know if I can do this," he continued. "I know I'm better than your average chef, but compared to the veterans in the grand noble houses or the talents in the royal palace, I'm little more than a beginner! I can't help but think I'll bring shame to Viscount Ryner and his daughter. It's pathetic, I know, but it scares me..."

He hung his head. It managed to make him look smaller.

"So, you figured you'd try to floor them with something you can't get around

here—fish," Mitsuha said.

"Yes, precisely."

She took a moment to think. *Hrmm... I could just sell him the fish and leave it at that. I'd make some good money and help him out—everyone'd be happy. But... what's this strange feeling inside my heart?*

Oh, I know what this is... It's excitement. This could be lots of fun!

Mitsuha had a personal policy that didn't allow her to ignore things like this. "One moment, please," she said, then locked the door, closed the curtains, and put up a sign that read, "Closed Due to a Special Contract".

Who would've thought that sign would come in handy so soon?

Less than an hour after opening, there she was closing up shop. She went back to the counter and took out another sign, this one only partially complete.

"I'm also gonna start this service right now," Mitsuha said as she showed it to him.

It read, "From falling in love to running your land, Mitsuha's General Store will tell you how it's done! For a fee, of course."

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After explaining her plan, Mitsuha told Marcel, "We'll have a food and drink tasting tonight. Come over and bring three other people, including someone who has the power to make the final call. Oh, and make sure you bring your appetite." He promptly left afterwards, taking his new knife and other purchases along with him.

According to Marcel, the star of the party was the debutante herself, but after her introduction as a potential spouse, the focus would shift to exchanges between the nobles. The youths would chat among themselves while the adults would discuss... adult things. Because of this, they had no performances or ceremonies planned, so the party's quality would be based mostly on the food. Lady Adelaide and her dress would come next, then everything else. Mitsuha could see why Marcel was so worried—he was responsible for the most important part.

As soon as he'd left, Mitsuha jumped back to Japan, changed clothes, and walked outside. There was a girl she'd been friends with since kindergarten, who she called "Micchan". Micchan went to college in the city, and Mitsuha was headed in that direction, but it wasn't to meet with her childhood friend.

Eventually, Mitsuha arrived at the entrance of Micchan's home—also a liquor store—and shouted "Hellooo!" without any restraint. She'd been doing this since kindergarten, so both Micchan's family and their neighbors were used to it.

As usual, she was greeted by Micchan's dad. "Michiko's not here," he said.

Yeah, I know.

"I came to see you, actually."

"Well, that's a pleasant surprise. What's up?"

"Sell me some booze."

"Huh?!"

Persuading him to help her proved to be hard work, but Mitsuha managed it in the end. Micchan's father agreed to send the alcohol to her house once the order was filled.

Wondering how I convinced him? I told him that I got the chance to help cater a foreigner's party, so I had to bring some food and drink samples for them to try. It was basically the truth, right? I mean, Micchan's old man is sharp, so he'd see through any cheap lies. I also told him I'd buy lots more if they liked it. That must've been what swayed him. And it's not like I'm gonna drink any myself. Really.

After taking care of the drinks, Mitsuha bought some food with a long shelf life: boil-in-the-bags, canned goods, fruit, and so on. She also got ice cream and stored it in the freezer. As for fresh, ready-made side dishes, she'd worry about them closer to evening.

She placed an order for some high-quality fish at the nearby sushi shop, then called in some takeout soup and other meals from her favorite French food place. With all that done, she loafed around at home until it was time to buy

the remaining sides and pick up her orders.

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That evening, Mitsuha greeted her guests. “Welcome!”

Just as she’d asked, Marcel had brought three people with him. Two of them were obviously the viscount and his wife, while the third was a woman in her late twenties. Marcel told Mitsuha she was his second-in-command. As far as she knew, female chefs were a rarity. *If she climbed up to that rank in a noble’s kitchen, she must be really good.*

She led them to the table in the kitchen and introduced herself. “Please make yourselves at home. I’m Mitsuha Yamano, the store’s owner.”

They stayed quiet. So far, this was nothing but Marcel taking his friends out to dinner at a place he liked. The family’s problems were out of the picture for now. *We’ll only talk about them if we clear the first stage,* Mitsuha thought.

“Today, I’ll be bringing you a variety of foods to sample. Because of this, there won’t be any specific course order. I’ll bring things out as they’re ready. The portions are small, but there will be a lot of food going on just a few trays. Take from them at your own pace.

“Focus on tasting. Don’t force yourselves to eat it all or you won’t have room for the other dishes.”

The four of them nodded.



Let’s get to it.

“First up, consommé,” she said as she set the bowls on the table. For this course, at least, each guest got their own dish. It had come from Sucre, the French restaurant.

Thanks for your hard work, Chef Kanai!

The group had been stone-faced from the moment they entered the store, but just a single whiff of the soup made them soften up. And the taste? It was richer than the nobles themselves. They didn’t say a word, as they were far too busy emptying their bowls.

“I’ll bring out the rest. Try whatever catches your eye!”

And so Mitsuha began bringing the dishes.

There was cuisine from all over Earth—French, Chinese, Japanese, fusion, et cetera. Some meals were from proper restaurants, while others were simple side dishes, boil-in-the-bags, and canned goods from the supermarket. Of course, Mitsuha didn’t forget to plate the sushi and other fish dishes.

Then came the alcohol. Beer, wine, whiskey, brandy, and sake, among others. There was no shochu or cocktails, however. She made sure to give them a fair warning about the stronger liquors.

She’d expected to be barraged with questions, but everyone just ate and drank without saying anything.

This is kinda freaking me out...

As her company ate, they slowed down and finally began to pose questions. “All this is from a foreign country, isn’t it?” asked the viscount.

Whoa! Straightforward, aren’t we?!

“Yes, it’s all from my country and its neighbors,” she answered.

“Who prepared it?”

Already with the second one!

“Some of my countrymen.” It wasn’t a lie in the slightest.

“Where are they now?”

“They’ve retired and are now living peacefully in this country. Convincing

them to give me these samples was hard work! I had to promise never to ask for such a favor again."

"I see..."

"B-But then how will we learn to make any of this?!" Marcel joined in.

Yeah, this'd be pointless if he couldn't.

"I can get you the recipes. You can use them to practice until you get it right. We're having this dinner so you can memorize the taste."

Marcel and his second-in-command grimaced.

"What about the ingredients?" asked the viscount. "Can you tell us how you brought them here?"

Oh, well...

"Just leave it to me. It's my job, after all! From love advice to land advice, Mitsuha's General Store has got you covered! This time, I'm not selling you my help. I'm giving you a consultation! Of course, you'll have to cover the costs."

"Pfft... Hahaha... HAHAHAHA!" The viscount burst out laughing. "Lady Mitsuha, please allow me to hire your services. I need you to provide the ingredients and teach us to prepare the food."

Looks like I passed. I mean, of course I did. I'm pretty sure I had it in the bag with the soup. I can make some good money if I accept, but...

"I REFUSE!"

The viscount's face froze mid-smile.

"Oh, don't worry—I'll definitely help with the cooking," Mitsuha added. "But just that would be pretty boring."

"What do you mean?"

"I want you to let me handle the dress and the performance, as well. They didn't call me 'The Plumber of the Opera' in elementary school for nothing!"

"Performance?"

He completely ignored the "elementary school" and "The Plumber of the

Opera" parts. Well, it's not like I want him to ask about it.

The group then got to talking for a long while. The viscount eventually agreed to leave most of the party in Mitsuha's hands, but only under certain conditions, like requiring her to give frequent progress reports, provide detailed descriptions, and lead the rehearsals.

I guess it's only fair for him to be so strict. This event is way too important for him to take a laissez-faire approach and just leave it in the hands of some stranger. If he'd been stupid enough to do that, I wouldn't have taken the job in the first place.

Marcel and his second-in-command begged to take home the leftovers, so Mitsuha jumped back home and got some plastic bags for them.

Eat up while it's good, she thought, handing them out. *If you want, I'll think of a reason to get you some more.*

They don't have to be so desperate, though. It's not like they have to learn to make all *of this stuff. They'll still have their usual, local dishes, and I'll bring all the desserts. They were just supposed to pick whatever packed the greatest punch... They were pretty fired up, though, so I guess it went in one ear and out the other.*

The viscount took all the remaining alcohol and requested much, much more. Mitsuha made a mental note to bring the good news to Micchan's dad. A noble ball wouldn't be proper without enough food and drink, so the hosts tended to get way more than they actually needed. He was in for a whole lot of business.

I'll have to tell him to increase Micchan's allowance! she thought cheerfully.

Just when Mitsuha thought the meeting was over, the viscountess grabbed her shoulder and gave her an intense glare. Thankfully, she only wanted some shampoo and body wash. Mitsuha brought her some of the luxury products aimed at nobles and even sold the shampoo and conditioner separately.

Honestly, I'm pretty much ripping her off.

Naturally, her profit margins on daily necessities aimed at commoner girls were much slimmer. Because of the exchange rates between worlds, Mitsuha had to at least quadruple the original value when pricing her goods. For

example, if something cost her a thousand yen in Japan, she had to make the price in this world four silver to break even—this world's equivalent of four thousand yen. Making up for that by inflating the prices on items for nobles was perfectly fair, thank you very much. The blue bloods probably enjoyed having their own luxury items, anyway. Everybody won.

Huh? You're wondering why I sold shampoo to commoners for just eight silver? Oh, come now, this is a "Big Profits, Slow Returns" business! Going for ten, even twenty times the original price is standard, so doubling or tripling it ain't a big deal. What? Now you're worried I'm gonna run soap makers out of business? Well, I'm not selling soap*—just shampoo and body wash. People will still buy the stuff to do laundry or wash their hands and faces.*

Also, the happiness of girls around the world is obviously more important than the fate of some industry. Think about it!

The next day, Mitsuha headed back to Japan and got to work. First, she headed to a dressmaker—the same one Mitsuha had commissioned for a dress to stun the Bozes family. The modiste was a mildly degenerate woman who was crazy about cosplay. She was a bit too old for the hobby herself, so she instead lived vicariously through her female clients by playing dress-up with them. All for her job, of course. She was actually quite skilled at her craft, so much so that she'd opened her own establishment. While it was hard to tell whether her focus was business or pleasure, the money was flowing in.

After Mitsuha entered the shop, she made sure to butter up the owner, detailing how the dress had been very useful and played a huge role in her securing a sponsorship. The older woman was overjoyed to hear it. Mitsuha then started a new order for Adelaide. Upon hearing that she'd get to work her magic on a foreign noble lady's debutante dress, the seamstress gave Mitsuha a huge, sudden squeeze.

"Wh-Wh-What an honor! What bliss!" she cried.

Mitsuha even promised to bring back some photos of the event, which earned her a discount. The dressmaker asked for Adelaide's measurements and, if possible, to meet her, saying something about how it would help her conceive the girl's perfect dress.

That's all there is to it, right? She won't do anything weird to her, will she? Mitsuha wondered. *You can never tell with this lady.*

She also wanted to see examples of dresses from Adelaide's country; standards were important, after all. Mitsuha decided to deal with that part later. After some back-and-forth, the two agreed that she'd make three dresses. They also discussed ideas for a grand performance. One of her suggestions in particular piqued Mitsuha's interest.

I guess now I'm paying for a fake sword, too.

Once her business with the modiste was done, Mitsuha made her way to an electronics store. She couldn't find what she was looking for on the shelves, but she soon discovered she could have them ordered instead.

Let's see... I'll need LED bulbs, cables, and everything else... I'll get the batteries some other day... Movie cameras, wireless speakers, spotlights...

Think I'm taking this too far? No way! I can't mess up, so I'm just being as thorough as humanly possible! It's the same as going overkill on the food and drinks... I'm just takin' a page from the nobles. This is blowing a hole in my wallet, but once this thing is over, I'll make it all back and then some!

For now, though, I'm not gonna use my deep pockets. Instead, I'll have the captain exchange my yen into dollars and store the money in a foreign bank account. I'll go back to the holes when I make back what I'm losing in this investment.

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"I'm borrowing the lady, if you don't mind," Mitsuha said as she led Adelaide into a carriage.

Attended by two bodyguards, their destination was her base, Mitsuha's General Store. It was close to the noble district, so they arrived in no time. The coachman stopped right in front and waited while they went inside. Mitsuha had the bodyguards take a seat on the first floor. The men tried to argue, but they couldn't say a word when Mitsuha mentioned that she'd be undressing Adelaide to measure her. She assured them they wouldn't be leaving the building, either, so it was really a trivial matter.

She placated them further with some drinks, then brought Adelaide up to the second floor. Before entering the room, Mitsuha blindfolded her. The girl was caught off guard at first, but relaxed when Mitsuha told her the next step would require just a little bit of magic.

As she opened the door, Mitsuha jumped to Earth with Adelaide in tow.

“Hellooo!” she called out.

She had, of course, entered the shop of the aforementioned dressmaking zealot.

“Wow, wow, WOW!” came a voice from behind the counter.

Annnd there’s the zany manager! Mitsuha thought, taking off Adelaide’s blindfold.

“NOW THAT’S WHAT I CALL A BABE!”

Jeez, slow your roll, lady...

Adelaide was under the impression this was just another room in Mitsuha’s General Store, so her startled expression was due to this... creature.

“Just measure her, please,” Mitsuha said flatly. “You wouldn’t want to make a wrong move with a noble foreigner’s daughter. They’d have your head. Like, literally...”

The seamstress gulped, then took out her measuring tape. As she worked, she and Adelaide chatted with one another with Mitsuha as the interpreter. Adelaide spent the entire time bewildered, while the lady was in high spirits. Both parties ended up satisfied in the end.

Before they parted ways, Mitsuha gave the dressmaker a memory card. It contained photos of dresses from all across the capital—Adelaide’s, Amalia’s, the ones on display in noble boutiques, as well as those worn by Adelaide’s friends who’d already had their debuts. They’d gladly shown them off when Mitsuha praised their clothes, so she’d gone ahead and snapped a few photos. Some of the girls even insisted on putting them on, and those photos made the lady completely lose it.

The two girls left the same way they’d entered. Once they returned to the

first floor, Adelaide asked for a tour of the store. She loved it so much that Mitsuha felt pretty much forced to give her a little accessory to take home.

Whatever, thought Mitsuha. *I'll just tack that onto the Ryners' tab.*

She also treated Adelaide to a shortcake from the fridge. The noble girl found it delicious, obviously, but the fridge itself had her curious. Mitsuha merely said it was a magic box and told her not to tell anyone about it. All the while, the bodyguards stared.

I really don't blame them. I was hoping to earn a few more coins by tempting them with this shortcake, but I'm not totally sure that worked.

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By now, Mitsuha had been staying at Viscount Ryner's mansion for some time. However, she spent most of her time in the kitchen. She'd given out recipes, but seeing as she was the only one who could read them, she'd had to involve herself further. Mitsuha would read the recipes aloud, and the kitchen staff would take notes.

Y'know, I may not look it, but I'm actually a pretty good cook, she'd reflected. *I know how to make most dishes in your average cookbook, I've got the basics down, and I know how to make adjustments. Makes sense that I'm the boss of this operation.*

Marcel had picked several Earth dishes he found tasty, impactful, and easy to prepare in large quantities. He and his crew were now training to make them.

Currently, they were practicing with just a couple of servings per recipe. If they wanted a hundred times more, however, it wouldn't be as simple as just using a hundred times more ingredients. The culinary world demanded more tact. It was important to factor in things like the spread of the flames, the balance of the mix, and the relationships between ingredients. In many cases, just following a recipe wasn't enough. You had to develop a feel for it.

Man, if that ain't a pain, Mitsuha thought. Her tune changed when she realized that Marcel and everyone else in the kitchen had started calling her "Master".

"Master"...? O-Oh man, is it bad that I really like the sound of that?!

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Here it is! The big day!

What? You think this is sudden? Believe me, I thought it was really far away twenty days ago, but time just flew by and now here we are. Besides all the ordering I had to do, there was the cooking lessons, party hall management, rehearsals... Things got so hectic it was all a blur.

Ah! Damn, I haven't opened the store in days! Oh, well. The Ryners and their people were my only customers anyway.

...Wow, what a sad thought. Well, I'll get my name out there with this job. Yep.

During the past few weeks, Mitsuha had also obtained her driver's license. For manual transmission cars, at that. She assumed she'd use a car in this world someday, and since there were no proper roads, manual would be a better choice than automatic. That was something to save for a later date, however. She'd already purchased her first car, a Japanese subcompact with an automatic transmission and lots of trunk space. She had merely bought it for trips to and from nearby stores, rather than any long journeys.

Additionally, no matter how much she'd tried adjusting the seat, she just couldn't reach the pedals on larger cars. Driving was possible, but she could hardly see over the steering wheel. If she'd gone out on the road in such a posture, it would've caused an accident in minutes.

For the party hall preparations, she'd called upon Kunz to help out. He already had a decent grasp of what her requests were like and was a skilled workman in general. And of course he'd done an excellent job on the renovations. He'd even done them at a low rate, insisting that he wasn't there for the money. The challenging project had excited him, and above all he felt the most fulfillment when his clients were satisfied with his work.

Out of respect for his mentality, Mitsuha had decided to give him an extra reward: interior design and construction books she'd gotten from a secondhand bookstore. They looked so old, they could've been written in cuneiform, and had been extremely cheap.

Kunz had loved them so much he'd called her a goddess.

Yes, praise me more! she'd thought.

And so, the party was ready. It was now time for the guests to trickle in.

Among the attendees was a count named Albert von Bader. Like the other guests, he'd been invited to the mansion to witness Adelaide's debut celebration. He was one of the few who didn't look down on the Ryners as unwelcome nouveau riche.

Viscount Ryner's father had worked to bring their family into prosperity. The long-standing noble families merely suckled respect earned from the feats of their ancestors. In a sense, this made Viscount Ryner more worthy of his nobility than the complacent old nobles. Additionally, it was even more difficult for a commoner to become a noble these days than it had been in the past. In spite of this, his father had climbed straight to viscount, skipping the rank of baron altogether.

I can only imagine how brilliant he was, thought Albert von Bader.

Rumor had it that the current Viscount Ryner was an excellent person, too, and that he had a beautiful daughter.

Maybe it's wise to build a relationship with them. Perhaps this line of thinking is inappropriate... But if something were to happen to their only son before he can marry, his daughter would likely start searching for a groom. I should consider pushing my third or fourth son into the role.

While considering the possibilities, Count Bader followed the servants and entered the Ryners' main hall.

Oh? There doesn't seem to be much food on the tables, he thought. *I'm well aware they'll be replaced as they begin to empty, but this amount seems small regardless. Was this intentional?*

Though he found it curious, he decided not to think much of it. He merely took some wine when offered, relieved his dry throat, and went off to mingle with some of his noble acquaintances.

A short time later, the host began his introduction. Viscount Ryner stood on

the small stage in front of the hall, thanked his guests for coming, and introduced his daughter, Adelaide... though she was noticeably absent. Having said his part, Viscount Ryner retired from the stage.

What is happening here? Count Bader wondered, certainly not alone.

Not a moment later, the place where the viscount had been flooded with smoke.

The guests closest to it were alarmed at first, believing it to be some sort of fire, but quickly noticed that the smoke was spreading in a strange way; it seemed to be pouring in from the sides of the stage. The servants were unfazed, on the other hand, meaning this was part of the show. Though some guests voiced their confusion, there was no real panic.

With the exception of those who sought spouses for their sons, most nobles considered these sorts of parties little more than dull gatherings to attend out of boredom, courtesy, or habit. Seeing something so new intrigued everyone, Albert von Bader included.

The smoke thinned as it flowed over the stage, creating a layer across the floor. Tendrils of it reached the nobles, who found it peculiar that breathing it in didn't choke them, and it didn't smell like smoke at all. On the other hand, it did make them feel a little chilly.

A voice rang out.

"Good evening! Thank you all very much for coming. Without further ado, I give you the Ryner family treasure, the charming flower fairy... Lady Adelaide! Feast your eyes on her lovable form!"

It was a girl's voice, and seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere all at once. She wasn't shouting, but her words were strangely loud—enough so to resound throughout the hall.

"Watch as our lady makes her debut!"

Suddenly, scenery appeared on the white wall ahead.

What?! Count Bader's jaw flopped open.

The other guests were equally astonished. It was a bizarre sight to behold—

the wall was now some sort of illuminated painting, and showed a beautiful garden full of dancing fairies. Mixed with the milky smoke, the scene was nothing if not fantastical.

Then, a girl revealed herself from behind the curtains.

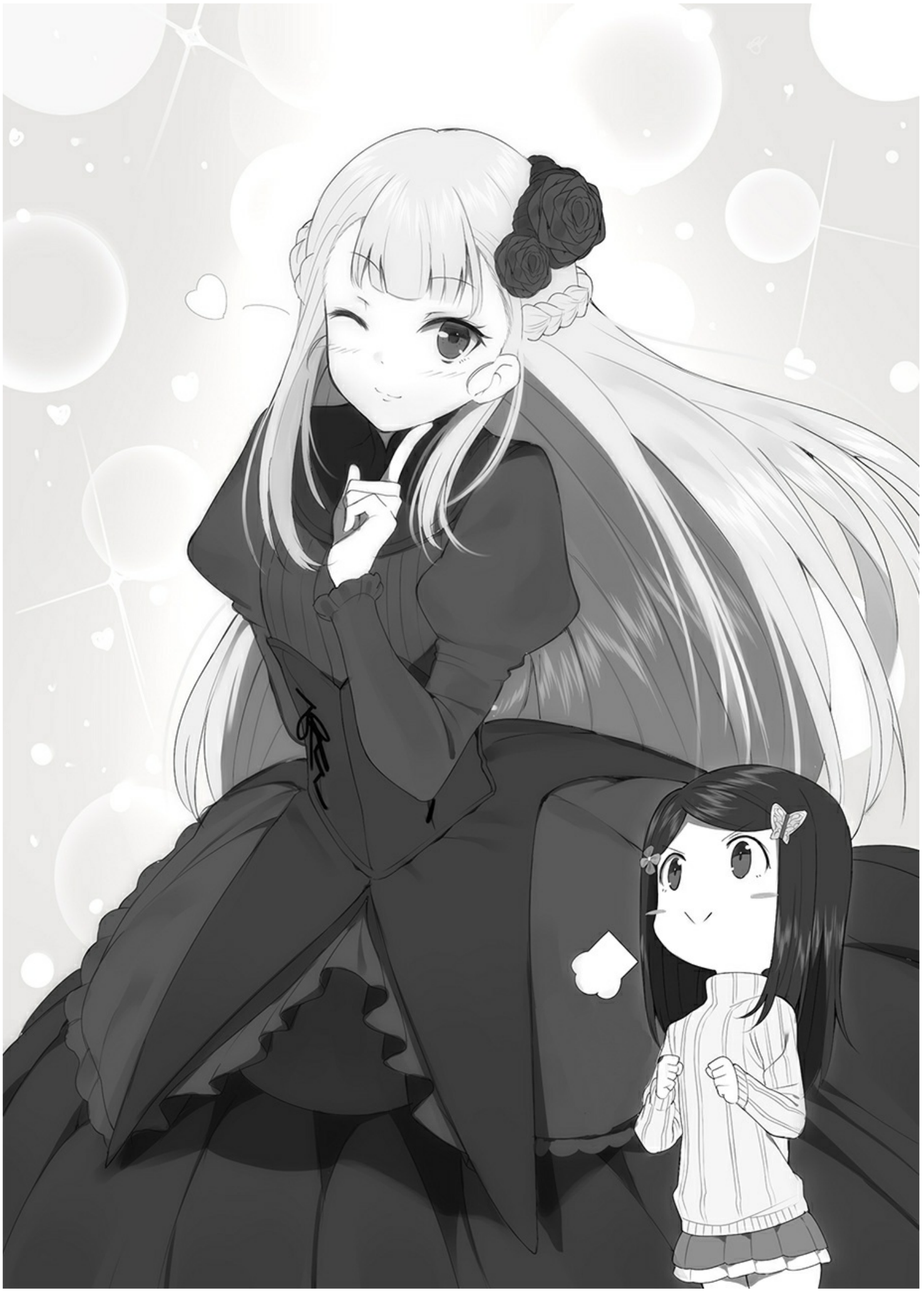
“WHOOOA!” The crowd’s collective cry of amazement reached all corners of the room.

The flower fairy, clad in a white dress, danced lightly across the stage, filling young and old alike with wonder. The girl’s beauty and charm were dazzling enough, but the dress she wore was in a class of its own. The silk was of the highest quality, and the design was novel, striking, and immaculately detailed. The audience had never seen anything like it. Some parts of it sparkled as she moved, and they could only assume it was bedazzled with gems.

The girl stopped in the middle of the stage and faced the crowd.

“Which one of you will take me?” she asked coquettishly.

It was quite the heartstopper of a line. The boys watched with flushed faces as Lady Adelaide walked off behind the curtain on the other side. Even the men, in spite of their many encounters with all kinds of beauty, were charmed ever so slightly.



All right! So far, so good! Mitsuha cheered. She was at the edge of the stage,

microphone in hand.

There were speakers on both sides, lots of dry ice doused in hot water, and a projector connected to a laptop. It was the kind that could project from the side rather than the front. All this technology was powered by a battery Mitsuha had bought at the home improvement store. Because of some mic-related problems and Adelaide's refusal to voice over the performance, Mitsuha had ended up as both the narrator and the emcee. As for the projected background, it was a random fairyland scene she'd found on the internet.

At the moment, the maids were changing Adelaide's costume. They'd broken their backs training to make the process as swift as possible.

Now's probably a good time, Mitsuha thought, and changed the projection to a picture of a noble mansion. She then slipped back into her narration.

"The lord is away. A horde of bandits is using this opportunity to ransack the fiefdom. Most soldiers left with the lord, leaving only the lady and a small troop behind..."

Ohh, they changed the setting! Count Bader clapped, completely enthralled. The other guests seemed to share the sentiment. *I do wonder how they changed the picture, though...*

Adelaide walked back on the stage, this time clad in a different costume: an armored dress with a blue color scheme. She clumsily held a sheathed sword in hand. It was as ornate as the most prized decorative blades. She was followed by an old man who was perhaps her butler. They both stopped in the middle of the stage.

Mitsuha's voice echoed throughout the room again. "Madam, the brigands have sprung an attack on a nearby village!"

"We're going. Tell the remaining soldiers to prepare to march."

"But madam, we mustn't! They should be kept here for an emergency! Also, if something were to happen to you—!"

"Is this not an emergency?! It is my duty to protect our people in my husband's absence!"

Mitsuha spoke those familiar lines with burning enthusiasm. Adelaide and the butler lip-synced along with her words.

“Very well... I won’t stand in your way. Let us hold them off at the river and buy time until our lord returns. I shall, of course, attend at your side.”

“Thank you. By the way, may I ask you something?”

“Yes, madam?”

“Buying time is fine, but you won’t mind if I *cut them all down*, will you?”

The line was third on Mitsuha’s list of things she’d always wanted to say. Finally having a reason to do so sent her over the moon. *Oh, if only my brother were here to see this...!*

The crowd broke out in cheers. Adelaide gripped her blade with both hands, thrust it into the floor, and faced the audience with a dignified expression.

“I ask of you... Are you my soulmate?”

The roar of the crowd reached an explosive crescendo. With that, the play was over, and the two left the stage.

Success! So glad I got that 18,000 yen Excalibur in Akihabara! Mitsuha thought as she watched them. Adelaide had liked the prop blade so much that she’d asked to keep it, and Mitsuha had been just fine with that. It couldn’t cut, but it was made of real metal. The heaviness probably made it a good exercise tool.

Adelaide was changing costumes yet again. This dress would be a normal one, since she needed to move around and mingle with her guests. It didn’t take long for her to come out. She was wearing a cute pink dress perfect for a girl her age.

The dressmaker had worked extremely hard on this one. Material, design, sewing—every aspect was filled with her soul... maybe even too much of it. She’d determined she would never receive a job of this caliber ever again. It was literally the work of a lifetime, and she’d treated it as such.

“As of today, I’m no longer a fairy,” said Adelaide. “I shall now do my best as a member of high society. I hope we get along!” She walked off the stage and

toward the crowd, welcomed by a storm of applause. The young nobles banded around her and made a real commotion.

Done! What a show! Mitsuha thought in satisfaction. *Good work, Adelaide!* All that was left now was to complement their mingling with some good food.

Mitsuha gripped her microphone tightly. “Now, please relax and enjoy your evening. While your tables hold the standard fare, at the back, you will find exotic foods from a distant land. If you’re feeling daring, be sure to give them a try! There is also a selection of foreign beverages. Each drink’s potency is marked. You should try them with the appropriate amount of water or ice.”

Oh, so that’s why the tables are a bit sparse, Count Bader thought. *Foreign food isn’t for everyone, after all. Well thought-out...*

Knowing he could eat the standard courses at any time, he went to try the exotic food before he got lost in conversation. But the dishes on the table made him stop in his tracks.

Wh-Wh-What?! Is that... fish?! Not dried, but fresh *fish? And those bits on the ice look raw... But that’s impossible!*

The other nobles were also staring at the plates in disbelief and nervousness. After all, it was something that just shouldn’t have been here. No one wanted to touch it, and everyone knew why.

Are they even edible? What if they’re rotten? Count Bader wondered, but he’d seen enough fish to know these were fresh.

Still, the collective doubt was too strong, and no one was willing to try them. Count Bader, however, saw this as an opportunity to do the Ryners a small favor.

Here I go! It’s your time to shine, Albert von Bader! He mustered up his courage as he reached for an empty plate. He took a small sample of all the seafood he could find, including fried fish, boiled fish, and rice topped with raw fish, and brought the first piece to his lips. His heroism earned him some praise from his fellow nobles.

“Delicious...” the count uttered in astonishment, then rushed to take even more. The rest of the pack, having seen one of their members survive the

ordeal, edged forward to try it for themselves.

"It truly is..."

"Superb!"

It only escalated from there. The food—fish or otherwise—began to vanish like it was going out of style, only for the servants to bring replacements. They were soon noticed and joined by the youth surrounding Adelaide, as well as the ladies idly chatting.

Sweet, it's all going well! Mitsuha thought. *Too well, actually. I can't shake the feeling something bad is about to ha—* Out of nowhere, a hand latched onto her shoulder, freezing her in place.

"Just *what* are you doing in this dump...?" The voice was as strong and fierce as its owner's grip.

Sweating bullets, Mitsuha turned around and saw none other than Countess Iris Bozes. *Oh, right... This is a party! That means the ballroom season they mentioned has already started! Crap, I completely forgot!*

Not giving Mitsuha a chance to speak, Lady Iris dragged her to the Bozes' table. "Mitsuha. Might I ask what's going on here? You refused to live with us, didn't you? So why are you here, of all places?"

Y-Your eyes are freaking me out, Mitsuha thought.

"I went to your shop countless times, only to find it closed! Do you have any idea how worried I was?! And now I find you in this dump! What's the meaning of this?!"

Mitsuha would've liked it if she stopped calling this place a "dump". It wasn't good for the Ryners' reputation, although their status wouldn't have allowed them to complain to a countess. Mitsuha made calming Lady Iris her number one priority.

"I-I don't live or work here or anything! I'm just here to represent my store! I did a couple odd jobs for them, made some deliveries... That's it, I swear!"

Lady Iris was still glaring, but the response had been enough to stop her from chewing the girl out. Count Bozes shot Mitsuha an awkward smile.

“Wait, where’s Alexis?” Mitsuha asked, quick to change the subject. The only ones at the table were Lady Iris, Count Bozes, and Theodore. Beatrice, still too young to make her own debut, was absent.

“Oh, he’s over there with Lady Adelaide” Theodore said. “Hmph. He never changes...”

“Ohh, I see the eldest son knows how it works,” Mitsuha said, prompting a bewildered look from him. “I mean, this *is* Lady Adelaide’s debut party, isn’t it? Men who ignore the star of the show to talk with other girls are the absolute worst, don’t you think? Even if they end up disliking her, they should at least talk to her. It’s the polite thing to do.”

“E-Excuse me for a second!” the boy said, then sprung up from his chair and ran off. Count Bozes smiled yet again.

“ANYWAY!” Lady Iris raised her voice again. “You are to visit us as soon as possible!”

“Okay,” Mitsuha replied meekly. A moment later, someone grabbed her by the shoulder again.



Jeez, what now?! And why do I have such a bad feeling about this?

She turned and saw Marcel's second-in-command, a sister-in-arms who'd braved the hellish days of training at her side.

"W-We have a problem! Th-There..."

Huh? She's stuttering?! It's gotta be bad!

"There's not enough food!"

"HUUUUHHHH?! Didn't we make enough?! You and Marcel both said we'd even have leftovers! What happened?!" As Mitsuha pressed her for answers, the chef looked like she was about to cry.

"That's how it would normally go, but for some reason, no one is leaving! Also, they're chatting around the food now, so there's less and less of it by the minute..."

Usually, the nobles who'd shown up out of courtesy would leave as soon as the main event was over. Meanwhile, those who stayed merely nibbled the food they'd grown tired of long ago, and instead mingled with alcohol in hand. The latter saw these events as networking opportunities rather than diversions, as they presented a chance to acquire important information and connections. Here, that was simply not the case. Everyone was eating and loitering to their hearts' desire.

Of course we'd run out of food like this. I really overdid it...

The play had been so well-received that everyone wanted to talk about it, and there wasn't a single soul who'd left right away. Some even thought there might be something more in store, to say nothing of all the exotic food and drink keeping them around.

The kitchen staff had made enough food for a *usual* affair. It was actually double the amount they expected guests to consume, but that was standard for any noble event. There was also the rule of thumb that any food eaten absolutely had to be replaced. Empty plates were basically a sin. Even plates with only a quarter of the food left were impermissible, as it would give the guests the impression that the hosts didn't make enough food, which was tantamount to an insult. If such an affront happened here, the Ryners would be branded as nobles so poor they couldn't prepare enough food for a single party.

I can't let that happen! Mitsuha thought. *No noble's gonna tolerate something like this. And besides, this is Adelaide's debut party—her future depends on it!*

To prevent something like this from happening, nobles tended to prepare obscene amounts of food prior to the event. They didn't *want* to waste money, but it was a safety measure put in place to prevent a lifetime of embarrassment. This meant that anyone who failed to provide on this front was subpar as a noble, no matter the reason.

This is an emergency. I've gotta do something!

"Excuse me for a moment!" Mitsuha said to the Bozes, then ran off to the kitchen.

The chefs in the kitchen were bereft of life, and had they not been in the middle of cooking, they'd no doubt be pushing up daisies. Thankfully, there was still time. They'd run out of food if things went on as they did, but they hadn't run out *yet*.

Mitusha looked around, examining her options, and noticed a box half-filled with potatoes. She'd memorized the menu and knew that there were no plans to use them, meaning that they were extras.

"Can you get some oil boiling?" she asked Marcel.

His reply was lifeless. "Yesh..."

Keep it together, man! Mitsuha thought, then switched to giving orders. "All right! Peel those potatoes! Cut them up and fry them in oil! We scrapped some stuff from the menu, right?! Make that! We'll have lots of good food, and fast! You remember how, right?! Get to it!"

"Y-Yesh..."

"Stop dragging your feet! Didn't you promise you wouldn't bring shame to the viscount and his daughter?! Don't act like there's anything more terrifying than messing that up!" Her harsh words instantly woke him out of his stupor, and soon his eyes were gleaming with vigor.

"We don't have time to get new ingredients, so use what we have! Empty the

pantry! Take all the ingredients you didn't plan to use and bring them to the table! See what you can make with them! Think simple, fast, and large amounts!

"Even commoner dishes are fine! Nobles probably don't know the difference, so just tell them it's foreign cooking! Use potato peels or pumpkin seeds if you have to—just make something! I'll buy some time, so don't waste it! And bring out the biggest plates you've got!"

Mitsuha fetched a big cardboard box from the corner of the kitchen. It was three feet on all sides. While large, the box was lighter than it looked.

"I had this stuff saved for the afterparty, but I'll use it now!"

She started emptying the box, one bag after another. Fried squid, peanuts, roasted almonds, peanut and rice cracker mixes, squid-flavored peanuts, crispy fried cutlets with sauce, chocolates, rice crackers, potato chips... She opened them all, poured them onto plates, and had them sent out to the hall.

"It's a bit early, but screw it—we're bringing out the dessert right this instant!"

The guests who'd brought their children often stayed until the end, so they hadn't brought out the dessert yet. Doing it too early could distract the youths from Adelaide and all the other food, but given the circumstances, there was no other option.

Mitsuha had supplied most of the desserts. She'd cut no corners trying to capture the hearts of the children and impress the Ryners. *Eat this! My ultimate weapon!*

She went back to the hall and took the mic.

"Ladies and gentlemen, pardon me for the interruption. I want to inform you that we've prepared more exotic foods. This time, there are snacks, drinks, and desserts."

Well, that sure got their attention, she thought.

"Try pairing the snacks with different drinks to excite your palate. The dessert, however, goes best with juice. I believe the gentlemen here will enjoy this

course just as much as the ladies and children.”

The crowd stampeded to the snacks and dessert.

All right. If they’re too busy drinking, they won’t eat as much food. Getting blitzed makes it harder to eat, too, and a good dessert paired with some juice fills you up in seconds.

For dessert, there was cake, shortcake, fruit, chocolate pastries, cookies, pudding, mousse, cream puffs, ice cream—just about anything, really. The ladies, children, and adolescents were floored by the selection.

Yes... Let the power of Japan’s sweets industry flow through you!

After a good deal of stalling, the servants brought in the deep-fried potatoes, as well as the impromptu meals. They were followed by courses that had actually been a part of the plan. Somehow, they succeeded in reaching the end of the party without embarrassing themselves with any empty plates.

What? You’re wondering if the party was a success? Is that even a question?

◇ ◇ ◇

What a stupendous night that was, Albert von Bader thought as he walked to his carriage. His mind was consumed with thoughts of the party. *It started out with a play... Although brief, it was nothing short of excellent, and I still can’t wrap my head around how those pictures worked.*

The girl herself was beautiful, and her stunning dresses only added to her charm. Their materials were so high quality and the designs so elaborate that I couldn’t even guess their price. And the foreign food and drink was excellent beyond compare!

I can’t imagine the wealth and connections it must have taken to construct such an affair. A lady’s coming-of-age may be important, but who would lavish such resources without a second thought? Just how powerful are these Ryners?

Hmm, perhaps I’m not close enough with them. Fixing that will no doubt be beneficial, and if possible, I would love to have that charming maiden as a daughter. I’ll have to light a fire under my sons...

The horses cantered off, taking the count to the Bader capital mansion. He

ruminated about what had just happened, as did all the other guests who'd attended the party. Most were merely blown away, but the ones with daughters who would soon debut were absolutely distraught.

How can I compare to this? they thought. *How can I make my daughter's debut as impressive as this one? Please, help... Someone... Anyone...*

Thus, a number of nobles asked for Viscount Ryner's help and became indebted to him, and Mitsuha's General Store profited immensely from this venture.

As for Mitsuha herself, she had officially retired from party planning. *Sure, I'd be down to sell some ingredients, but never again with the whole hosting thing. No giving out complete dishes, either. I mean, it was a real pain, and I don't even wanna think about what could've happened to me if I'd screwed up. No theatrical stuff, either. They can handle that all by themselves.*

The Ryners were a special case. I only did it 'cause the viscount, his wife, and Marcel were referred to me by my first customers. Besides, they seemed like good people, and I desperately needed the publicity. With that out of the way, I just need some good ol' R&R.

Cooking lessons? Oh, for the other noble families? Marcel can handle that.

There had also been a casual, makeshift afterparty for Mitsuha and the staff. Plenty of ingredients had gone unused, so the chefs had done some experimenting—boiling veggie peels in oil and such—and they'd all had a great time trying the results. Naturally, the servants and the viscount's family joined in. The servants had been a bit sad they hadn't gotten to try the foreign food or the snacks from Mitsuha, and those who were backstage or in the kitchen had been disappointed about missing the play.

I mean, they did see the rehearsals, and they tried the foreign food while Marcel and his team were training! Though, yeah, none of that was perfected yet...

There had also been a great deal of alcohol left over. While Mitsuha wasn't yet of age, she saw no reason for abiding by Japanese law in another world. Even Adelaide had enjoyed her fair share of drinks... as tragic as it'd been.

I'm not drinking with her ever again, end of story! And don't even ask about it!

In the end, Mitsuha made 260 gold coins. Apparently, it was normal for events like these to cost upwards of 300. Having seen luxury kimonos with obscene price tags, Mitsuha didn't find it unusual that the same could happen with dresses. Some even had authentic gems sewed in, and the prices could skyrocket from there depending on the gem's type and quality.

Additionally, food was always gratuitously lavish. Not only did the nobles have to provide the best-quality meals from local ingredients, but they also had to bring something exciting to the table to stimulate their guests' dulled tastes. The money involved there was a whole new brand of madness.

Though, that's kinda understandable... Transporting and preserving food is hard work in this world, Mitusha thought, feeling smug about the fact that such problems didn't affect her.

But let us return to the important part: the 260 gold coins. That was about 26 million yen in this world and 6.5 million back on Earth—an impressive figure even if you accounted for the equipment, ingredient, and dress expenses. Then again, the only food Mitsuha had actually brought with her were the complete meals and specialized items like fish and snacks. The Ryners had provided the lion's share of the ingredients.

Mitsuha had also been paid separately for the fish and the other ingredients used during cooking training. After all, their practice versions had replaced all the meals in the household. Even the servants had eaten like royalty. It was a shame the servants would likely never feast so richly again. But Mitsuha's primary focus was the hefty sum she'd earned from the affair. She still owed debts to the mercenary captain, however, so she wouldn't be using her "deep pockets" just yet.

Of course, she hadn't forgotten about the photography. She'd personally trained two servants to use cameras, and they'd dutifully taken both photos and videos of the event. Mitsuha couldn't be bothered to pick and choose from them, so she sent them all to the dressmaker.

She'd edit and copy the stuff even if I didn't ask her to. Then I'll print out some stills and sell them to the viscount for even more money!

The modiste had requested prints, too, but she'd obviously make some herself. Probably life-sized. *Hey, I should ask her to make the ones I'll sell to the viscount. I'm guessing she'd make them for free.*

The day after the party, Mitsuha was so tired that she spent the entire day lazing around the store. She was especially glad to have her private quarters on the second floor. *With this, I don't need to return to Japan all the time... I can relax here just fine. There's even a bath! Well, I'd be lying if I said the bath back home wasn't a whole lot better, but I've gotta get used to living here.*

That's a little easier said than done with the bathroom, though. I mean, taking care of a "number one" is easy. I've got a Western toilet, and it even flushes. The carpenters hooked it up to a water tank that's linked to the well with a motor pump.

As for "number two"... Uhh, I did make it usable in case guests came, but there's... y'know... the clean-up part. For now, I'm just gonna keep jumping back home whenever I've gotta drop the kids off at the pool, if you know what I mean.

Two days later, Mitsuha opened her store for the first time in ages. It was business as usual. It had been so long that the neighbor lady came to check up on her.

Oh, the beauty of human sympathy! Mitsuha felt so moved that she gave her another towel.

A few days passed after her reopening. It was three o'clock—close to closing time.

Ding-a-ling!

My first customer in a while! Mitsuha cheered on the inside, though she hadn't been entirely dry. She'd had a decent amount of people come and buy things like shampoo, shampoo, and of course, shampoo. She *did* sell other wares, but the overwhelming majority of her customers were girls buying shampoo.

The number of customers was steadily growing, at least, and she made enough sales to live her everyday life. If you can recall, Mitsuha had keen senses

when it came to her profit margins. Additionally, she owned the place, so she didn't have to worry about rent.

Anyhow, let us return to her current customer... As soon as he entered, the man stomped over to Mitsuha like he was on the warpath.

"Give me fish," he grunted.

"Huh?"

"I said, give me fish!"

"Sir, this is a general store. You may want to visit the fish shop instead." Mitsuha had no idea if there were any in this town, but she had to guess there were none. She was actually quite cold to people with bad attitudes, if you couldn't tell.

"Stop fooling around! I did my research, and I know you sell fish! Do you have any idea what will happen if you don't do it right now?!"

"No. Do tell me."

"The insolence...! Do you really not know the consequences of refusing Lord Turck?!"

"What? You're a baron?"

"Wha...?" Her question caught him off guard. "C-Certainly not! I'm the baron Lord Turck's head chef!"

Yeah, I could tell he wasn't a noble. I've got eyes, and they work just fine.

"What brings a baron's head chef to my establishment?" Mitsuha asked, her customer-service smile fading.

"Since coming back from that accursed Ryner affair, all he does is complain about the food! He demands to be served what he had at the party. I asked around, and discovered it was exotic food that used fish. I can easily make food of that caliber as long as I have the ingredients. That's all I need!"

"Ohh, well... I didn't actually 'sell' any fish, per se. I accepted a request to host the entire party, and the fish was simply a product I had to provide to complete the contract. It's not the same as selling fish."

“What?!” he snapped. “Stop talking nonsense and just do as I say! If you don’t, I’ll—”

“What’s all this noise?”

Whoa, it’s Lady Iris! Mitsuha thought. *Crap, I totally forgot about the Bozes... again!*

“Why haven’t you come to see us?!” she asked aggressively.

“Oh, I... I’ve been pretty busy lately...”

“With this man, perhaps? Is he your customer?” She looked down her nose at the head chef. The sudden appearance of an obviously noble lady had him nearly cowering.

“Uh, no. Not by a long shot,” Mitsuha said, then quickly changed her tone. “He said he would hurt me if I didn’t do as he said! I don’t know what’ll happen to me now...”

“HUH?!” The man immediately turned pale.

“Wh-What are you—?”

“What business do you have with our girl?”

They were joined by Count Bozes himself.

“Eep!” the head chef squeaked.

Feel that? That’s the heavy air of nobility.

“N-Nothing... I’m just a customer looking for some—”

“He said he works for the Turcks, and that he’d hurt me if I don’t do as he sa—”

Ah. He escaped. Didn’t even let me finish. Look at him go.

“I’ll be sure to mention this to Lord Turck,” said the count.

Lady Iris had an ice-cold smile on her face.

“I, uhh...”

Before Mitsuha could argue, she was thrown in the carriage and shuttled off to the Bozes’ mansion.

Umm, can we turn around for a sec? I wanna lock the door.

Chapter 9: Adventurers

“Hey! No fair!” Beatrice was livid.

Mitsuha had been taken to the Bozes capital mansion, where she was instantly put on trial. The judge and prosecutor was none other than the Bozes’ youngest child and only daughter, Beatrice. Mitsuha had no defense, as both Alexis and Theodore had run away.

“Why didn’t I get to go to the party?!” she asked.

“You’re thirteen. You haven’t come of age yet,” Mitsuha replied.

“B-But all that tasty food! And sweets!”

“Sorry...”

“What about my debut, huh?! You’re gonna make it up to me by throwing me the best one ever, right?!”

In the end, Mitsuha had to promise that her debut would have an electric parade, a fireworks show, and food stalls, including ones for takoyaki and cotton candy.

Let’s hope she forgets about it in the next two years.

Come dinner, she was barraged with questions.

“What *was* all that food?”

“How about those pictures?”

“Just *where* did you get the odd things you’re selling in your store?”

Knew this was coming. I guess it’s time to make something up.

Mitsuha ran with the following story: The friends she’d left behind in her country were so worried about her well-being that they’d secretly sent her things by boat. Since they sent so much, however, Mitsuha had decided to sell the extras. She added that the boats were small and swift, and that they only brought the supplies at night.

What a crock, she thought when she finished. *Hope it lines up with my story*

so far... Then again, they'd probably understand a little white lie or two, considering I'm trying to hide my identity.

H-Huh? You won't pry any further...? Wow, Count, you really are a stand-up guy. Wait, "We're dealing with Mitsuha, after all"? What's that supposed to mean, Lady Iris?! Ah, sorry. Forget I said that!

Once the matter was over, the rest of the family joined in to chat.

The what, now? "Artificial golem soldiers?" Huh? I told you about them? Doesn't ring a bell, sorry. Salt-making? You're hell-bent on that, huh, Count? Oh? Your territory has a coast? All right, I'll look it up on the internet.

Alexis? You found me more charming than Adelaide? Yeah, right. Are you okay in the head? Know your place, I'm older than—Hold on. Count? Lady Iris? Why are you encouraging him?!

Ah, Theodore and Beatrice are on my side! You guys want me to spend the night here because it's late? Okay. I expected this, anyway. I'll have a glass of wine and it's lights out.

The next day, Mitsuha returned to the store right after breakfast. She had to open, after all. Diligent girl that she was, she couldn't skip out on work for no reason.

Well, there goes the weather, she thought, watching a murky wall of clouds move in. A drizzle soon followed, which grew to a downpour in no time. It was the first rain Mitsuha had ever seen in this world.

How does everyone get by when there's barely any rain? she wondered. *Maybe I missed some when I went to Japan? Either way, there's no way I'm getting any customers now. The locals probably don't have umbrellas... Ah! Maybe I should start selling them myself!*

The bell rang not a moment later, catching her by surprise.

Customers?! In this weather?!

"Sorry," came a woman's voice as she stepped inside. "We'd like to stay here until the rain passes, if you don't mind."

Oh. Well, that's fine by me. I like people with manners, and she's easy on the

eyes. Hmm, so there's three other people with her... Wait, hold on a sec!

"A-ADVENTURERS!" Mitsuha cried.

"Huh?" The four raised their eyebrows in unison.

Two of the party members were male, and two were female. One of the men had black hair and a muscular frame that supported the greatsword on his back. The other was a slim blond who wielded a spear. The woman who'd spoken had red hair and a sword in her belt, while the girl had silver hair, a bow on her back, and a dagger in her belt.

Mitsuha guessed the larger man was nearing his thirties, the blond just over twenty, the redhead about twenty or so, and the girl no older than sixteen. Though petite, she was at least more mature than Beatrice, so Mitsuha assumed she was about as old as Adelaide. She took a look at the girl's chest, and a feeling of camaraderie washed over her.

Anyway, it's a ragtag group of specialized fighters! There's no way they aren't adventurers!

"Actually, we're just mercenaries..." one of them said.

Well, I stand corrected.

Although the group hadn't come to buy anything, they still took a look around the store, perhaps as a courteous gesture. Whatever the reason, they found Mitsuha's inventory extraordinary enough to have a good time browsing. The bigger man was mesmerized by the knives, the blond captivated by cookware, the redhead charmed by the accessories, and the archer transfixed by the tools.

"They're so cuuute," said the redhead as she looked through the trinkets. They weren't too expensive, but "mercenary" wasn't the most lucrative career during peaceful times, to put it lightly.

The rain showed no signs of abating, so Mitsuha boiled some water and prepared tea and snacks for her guests.

"Would you like some?" she asked.

"Huh? I don't have any money..." An instant response from the redhead.

"Oh, this is free. I'm not getting any customers in this weather, but I can't just

leave either, so I'm kinda bored. I was hoping we could chat."

"Oh, then sure thing!"

"Ah, hey..." The bigger man cracked a strained smile at his companion's lack of caution.

In the end, they all accepted her invitation and joined her at the table in the kitchen. As it turned out, they were all mercenaries from the same village. The black-haired man was Sven, twenty-seven years old, the blond was Szep, twenty-two, the redhead was Gritt, twenty-one, and the silver-haired girl was Ilse, sixteen. Mitsuha was disappointed to find out she wasn't a mage.

What a letdown!

She did find it strange that a sixteen-year-old was working as a mercenary, but she considered that her own worldview was the problem. Any villager who couldn't feed herself had the option of becoming a merc or bandit. Gritt said that she had also started out at sixteen.

At present, wars and local disputes were scarce. With so little demand for mercenaries, many of them had switched to marauding. These four, however, didn't stray from the more righteous path and continued making a living doing odd jobs, foraging, gathering, or going on hunts. Sadly, they earned so little they couldn't even afford replacements for their damaged weapons, let alone treat themselves to any luxuries.

"So yeah, we can't buy anything from you. Sorry." Looking apologetic, Gritt bit into a steamed bun Mitsuha had served with the tea.

Ilse was eating one too. Stuffing her face with it, actually. Mitsuha found it cute. *She looks like a hamster,* she thought. *Though she probably wouldn't want to hear that from me, of all people.*

The men were reluctant at first, but they couldn't resist the allure of hot food and were soon gobbling them up.

"Don't be shy," said Mitsuha. "Like I said, I'm really bored... Can I ask some questions?"

"As long as that's all you want, then yeah, ask away!"

They happily obliged her inquisitiveness about all sorts of things: their gathering and hunting trips, the guilds that referred them to jobs, the troubles and unexpected joys of travel, goals for the future, and so on.

This is it! Mitsuha thought. *I smell some serious money... and my nose never lies!*

“Umm, do the mercenary guilds take jobs from *anyone*?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Sven nodded, still eating a bun. “All that matters is that it ain’t illegal and doesn’t break the guild’s guidelines. They charge you a bit, though.”

“And designated jobs work just like you said they do, right?”

“Right.”

“Then how would you like to take a designated job from *me*?”

“Huuuh?” they blurted, all at once.

Mitsuha’s request was simple: she wanted them to take her on their next hunting and gathering trip, protecting and supporting her the whole way through. She claimed she wanted to learn how these jobs were done so she could stock up on items that might be useful.

The party considered her offer. Although she was a child, Mitsuha ran an impressive store. They appreciated that someone of her status was so considerate of people like them.

The forest they’d be working in was not too far from the capital. It wasn’t very dangerous, so looking out for her wouldn’t be difficult. It shouldn’t impact their work much, either. At worst, they might have to carry Mitsuha’s things —or the girl herself—but she was so small that it wouldn’t be a hassle.

And most importantly, they’d be paid. Hunting and gathering didn’t always go well, but these kinds of requests always guaranteed money. The guild would take the payments and distribute them to the mercenaries once the task was done. Plus, the only way they could fail this request was by getting attacked and wiped out by bandits, and what kind of bandit would attack armed and penniless mercenaries?

They concluded that this was basically easy money with no negatives

whatsoever. Furthermore, it would increase their reputation in the guild, since personal requests made mercenaries seem more trustworthy. Besides, they really wanted to establish a connection with this store. The potential of more jobs in the future—and more of these delicious treats—was just far too enticing. It wasn't even a choice, really. The four looked at each other and nodded.

"We'll take it!" they shouted in unison.

The mercenaries told Mitsuha that they would move out in two days. Once the rain passed, Mitsuha would close the store and they'd all head for the guild.

Oh, I forgot to ask about the pay, thought Sven, ever the party leader. *Well, whatever, I won't mind even if it's just a couple silver.* Needless to say, the gold coin she presented to the guild moved him. *Things are really looking up!*

The next day, after closing up shop, Mitsuha began preparing for the three-day trip. Besides the bare necessities, she stuffed her backpack with some odds and ends, the usefulness of which she'd asked the mercs about ahead of time. That was all well and good, but keeping the bag at a weight she could carry was a challenge. Some items were light, but too large, while others were small, but too heavy, and so on and so on.

The food and water were especially heavy. The place where they'd set up camp was near a stream, but she needed water for the journey there. At the very least, a quart didn't seem like enough. She most likely wouldn't be able to use world-jumping to stock up, either. One of their objectives was to protect her, so they'd surely keep an eye on her for the whole trip, nights included. Trying to jump in that situation would be too dangerous.

On the day of departure, Mitsuha woke up earlier than usual. She had a filling breakfast, then jumped back home to use the bathroom, as she didn't want to have to answer nature's call on the way there. She'd been told that they'd only be eating two meals on the first day, so she ate well in the morning to hold her over until evening. Though she did intend to have a snack or two regardless.

This world's travelers had a difficult relationship with food, as it was both heavy and took time to prepare. During trips like these, they could live off the land by eating wild plants and animals, but mercenaries preferred to take

anything they could sell back with them, often fighting off hunger for the money.

Because of all that, they only brought along the absolute minimum, then hoped to get by with just the wild goods that weren't worth much on the market. And if that didn't work out, they'd just make do with the little food on them. They said they'd prepare shares for Mitsuha as well, but she refused.

"Hey, I just wanna give this food a try! Don't look at me like that! There's nothing to worry about! Boil-in-the-bags are awesome!"

Boy, do I talk to myself a lot recently, she thought. *Well, I don't have anyone else to talk to. Anyway... Knife? Check. Dagger? Check.*

Mitsuha had given up on taking the short sword. It was way too heavy for her. There was a world of difference between short swords and daggers in that regard. The differentiation between "short sword" and "long sword" was actually based on what kind of soldier used them—the former for infantry, the latter for cavalry—so there were long short swords as well as short long swords. That basically meant that short swords were weapons used by adult foot soldiers. The term "short" was pretty deceiving.

Mitsuha needed something about half as long as a normal sword—a dagger, basically, like the one owned by Ilse. Twenty inches in overall length with a thirteen-inch blade would've been perfect. When she had mentioned this to the leader of the mercenaries, he'd made a face that said, "Yeah, had a hunch you didn't know what you were dealing with", much to her annoyance.

The knife was mostly a generic tool for survival and work, including skinning and whatnot. It wasn't as though she'd be doing that, but she felt it was good to have one for appearances' sake. Plus, it could easily work as a weapon.

It's kinda hard to tell the difference between knives and daggers. Like the "Mythril Dagger" in End-All Escapade IX, or whatever that game was called... It's clearly as short as a knife, but it's shaped like a sword. Then again, "Mythril Knife" doesn't sound nearly as cool. Guess it goes to show that feeling often trumps function! she thought, equipping both blades and a couple of guns.

By the time the four arrived at the mercenary guild early in the morning, Mitsuha was already there, despite the fact that they themselves came early to

keep her from waiting.

Just how excited for this is she?! The group was at a loss for words.

They found Mitsuha's get-up a little strange. She was wearing a plain top that had a surprising number of pockets and a tough-looking pair of blue pants.

Well, that's a whole lot better than some flashy, frilly dress.

She had a knife and a dagger at her waist. That was all good, but they didn't know what to think about the metallic object hanging on her belt. It wasn't too big, but looked pretty heavy. On her back, she carried a large bag, a small quiver, and some other strange tool. It looked like a bow at first glance and had a string on it, so they guessed it was a ranged weapon. Besides that, there were two large, cylindrical objects. They didn't look that heavy, but they were certainly long.

What's with all that stuff? Is it a girl thing? Is that bag full of spare clothes, make-up, and skincare or something? They hadn't even started, yet Sven was already feeling exhausted.

Once they were assembled, they set off. Sven was slightly moved that the young lady insisted on carrying the huge load by herself.

I don't have much stuff on me, so I really don't mind being a mule for her, he thought. *I guess she's at the age when she wants to show off. I'll just wait till she's tired and asks for help. I'll have game to carry on the way back, though, so I won't be able to help her then... But she'll probably have less to carry, too, what with the food she'll be eating and all.*

I don't even want to think about a case where we don't have much to carry at the end. Then again, there's still her payment, so... Damn it! No! Get a grip, Sven! It won't always be this easy!

Their leader's tendency to overthink things always gave him too much to worry about.

After several hours of walking with a few breaks in between, they arrived at the forest. They'd left early, so it was still only noon. The party had walked past a lot of merchants and other travelers, but overall, it had been a pretty uneventful trip.

The only thing Mitsuha took note of was how populated the road had been compared to the one in Colette's village. The path that branched off into the forest was just as empty as that one, however, and all she could hear were birds chirping in the distance. The presence of a footpath at least indicated that people walked through the area. According to Sven, they were mostly hunters, foragers, and mercenaries like themselves.

The group walked through the forest for half an hour before putting down their bags. They'd chosen a clearing not too far away from a stream.

Yep, looks like a good place to camp in, Mitsuha thought. Going any further would make hauling their equipment or any game they might catch all the more tedious, and it wasn't as though they'd gain much by setting up camp closer to the forest's center.

The mercenaries didn't want to let the daylight go to waste, so they started working right away, saying they'd set up camp once it was too dark to find anything. They wouldn't hunt today, since the meat would go bad over the next couple of days, so everyone took to gathering herbs and wild plants that sold for a pretty penny.

Yams, maybe? wondered Mitsuha. *Ugh, but they're so hard to dig up. When I was little, I tried getting one that was about as wide as my pinky, but I gave up after digging down, like, five or six inches.*

She tagged along with Gritt, asking if she could teach her the ropes as she prepared to help out. *I'll give her whatever I find, obviously. I'm not* that *greedy!*

There were no yams to be found. They looked mostly for wild fruits, vegetables, and that sort of thing. It was hard to tell whether some of these were herbs or food. Once it started to get dark, they went to set up camp.

If you can call this "setting up," anyway, Mitsuha thought as she looked at their bed. It was a piece of cloth draped over some grass clippings they'd spread on the ground. *No need for shelter when it's not raining, huh? And uh, am I supposed to join them? Not a chance.*

She walked several feet away, plucked a large cylinder from her belt, and started fiddling with it. A few seconds later, it made a loud shuffling sound as it popped open and spread out.

“Wh-What?!” Gritt jumped in surprise.

“Ta-da! The ‘anywhere tent’!” Mitsuha proudly presented the one-person pop-up tent she’d scored from the home improvement store’s bargain bin. It was small, but meant for adults, which made it pretty spacious for someone with her petite build.

“Urethane sheet!” Mitsuha spoke in a grandiose manner, but naturally the mercenaries had no idea what was happening. It just made things awkward. Slightly embarrassed, Mitsuha undid the other cylinder and spread out the sheet.

A tent and an insulating sheet... My bed, made in just a few seconds!

Sven’s eyes went wide.

“Do you think this would sell?” Mitsuha asked.

“Y-Yeah.”

The mercenaries said they’d normally make food out of any animal they encountered while foraging, but they weren’t so lucky today. Surviving out in the wilderness was far from easy. Thankfully, they’d found some edible, albeit bitter, plants. Trying to sell them just wouldn’t be worth it, but they could be used to make a soup that was mildly filling when paired with the hard bread they’d brought. Throwing in a bit of dried meat would give the stock a bit more flavor... but not much.

Gritt was hard at work trying to start the fire so they could make the soup, if it could be called that. She was using a bit of flint, but not having much luck. The wood and leaves here were still a bit damp from the rain.

“Umm, excuse me...” Mitsuha stood beside her, and she looked up. “Can I do it?”

Gritt—a veteran at firestarting—was having a hard time. Mitsuha also wasn’t some housewife who lit the hearth daily. In fact, they probably figured she’d never held a flint in her life. If Gritt couldn’t do it, there was no way Mitsuha could, right? Actually, she was more than capable... of starting a fire, at least. But the group had no way of knowing it, so they assumed she stood no chance. However, one of the reasons they’d brought her here was the experience, so

they couldn’t ignore her request.

Gritt extended the flint toward her and said, “Sure. Try it.”

Mitsuha held up a palm and refused. “No, thank you. I’ve got my own.”

She crouched down, squeezed a gel-like substance out of a tube, and rubbed some twigs into it. Then, she ignited them with a disposable, long-reach lighter.

“Wh-What?” Gritt was flabbergasted.

“Science wins!” All smug, Mitsuha puffed out her chest... though it was hardly noticeable. *Shut up, you!*

“How did she...?” Sven whispered.

By this time, Gritt had moved on to preparing the soup, while Mitsuha was making her own food. Curious about what she was doing, they talked among themselves.

The particular item that had them so perplexed was her micro camping stove. It was about half the size of a regular one—so small you could see half of the gas cartridge. Simmering above it was an aluminum pot full of soup. Beside Mitsuha, there were plates, utensils, some empty soup cans, a 148-yen pack of miniature red bean buns, and canned peaches that had been poured onto an aluminum dish.

Needless to say, it was too much for one person.

“The rest of her stuff’s all food?” Sven was awestruck.

“Ah, this is a bit too much for me to eat all by myself. Think you can help me? I’d like to have a taste of your soup in exchange, though.”

“GLADLY!” they shouted in unison.

This is so unfair... I feel like the owner of some shady gastropub.

“It’s so good...” said Sven after trying a spoonful of the rich soup. “When did you have the time to make this stuff? I thought you were just the spoiled daughter of some noble or merchant, but this just proved me wrong. You’re so good you can easily run a fancy restaurant.” He could hardly believe what he was eating.

Sorry, bud, that's just concentrated minestrone I bought at a supermarket.

"Wait, this is bread? It's so soft! And what's this inside?! It's so sweet!" Gritt stuffed her mouth with the cheap buns.

Ilse munched on her food without saying a word. Always the silent one, that girl. Speaking of silent, Szep didn't have much of a presence. Mitsuha had almost forgotten he was there.

And to think I was expecting him to be a womanizer like Alexis... Oh, I get it—he thinks I'm a child. That was a little ignorant of me, sorry.

"Well? Do you think this would sell?" she asked. "Everything besides the bread stays fresh for a long time."

Sven took a moment to think before answering, "Depends on the price, but nobles, rich people, and the army would go crazy for this."

"I see."

The army, huh?

Mitsuha felt that getting involved with army stock would bring her unwanted attention. Not to mention it'd make her so busy, she wouldn't have any time for herself. They'd probably buy things by the thousands. She doubted that even the count could protect her from the military.

"I can't provide that much," she said, "and rich people have good food all the time. Let them eat some nasty stuff while they're traveling, at least. I'll just try to sell these at a price that people like you can afford."

"Huh? Are you crazy?! D'you have any idea how much you'd make if you played your cards right?!"

"It's fine, I make enough off my other stuff."

Hmm... If I got one can for 150 yen on Earth, it'd be worth six small silver—the equivalent of 600 yen—here. And if I used fair prices instead of ripping off—I mean, using my shop's usual profit margins, they'd be eight to ten small silver each... 800 to 1,000 yen, basically. That's still a little too much to replace a poor merc's diet. At most, it'd be a once-every-few-trips luxury. Also, cans are kinda heavy, although freeze-dried food is even more expensive...

Ah, what about CalorieMates? Those little Japanese energy bars would be a good emergency snack in case they had terrible luck hunting or got lost or something. I could sell them for a higher price, since the mercs wouldn't be buying 'em every time. Welp, I guess I know what I'll show them tomorrow morning! I already have something in mind for lunch. Uhh, why do they all look so moved? Is the food that good?

After they'd eaten, the group went on to sit around the campfire and chat. Mitsuha boiled water and prepared some tea. Powdered black tea au lait, to be precise. It was cheap, easy to make, and tasty, which made it one of Mitsuha's favorites. Everyone loved it, so she mentally tacked it onto her growing list of future goods.

When she found a good opportunity, Mitsuha excused herself from the group. Having heard in advance that there would be a stream nearby, she'd prepared a little something to make bathing easier. She retreated into her tent and changed into a bikini. Well, it wasn't showy in the least. Simply put, it was hard to properly wash oneself in a one-piece swimsuit, so Mitsuha had purchased this one for just that. It was purely functional.

I'm not gonna use any soap. The water's just too clean to pollute, and using it in a swimsuit is a pain, anyway. I'll just take a quick dip and be done with it.

She left the tent, towel in hand, and immediately locked eyes with Szep. The cup he was holding slipped out of his hand.

"Y-Young lady... Y-You... You..."

"YOU IDIOT! WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?!" Gritt yelped. "MEN, TURN AROUND AND DON'T YOU DARE LOOK AT HER!"

Ilse ran up and threw her cloak around Mitsuha.

Huh? What's going on? Mitsuha thought.

"What are you thinking?! Why would you walk out naked?! There are men here! I know you're a child, but you're not that young anymore!" Gritt shouted, red as a tomato, while Ilse nodded furiously. Sven and Szep had escaped off to... somewhere.

"Hey, it's just a swimsuit. It's okay to show it..."

“Shut up! It’s not even underwear! You’re naked!”

Oh, right. Girls here wear those so-called “bloomers” or “drawers”. Now that I think of it, when I tried selling underwear to Beatrice and showed her mine, she actually fainted. Whoops... Sorry, girlfriend.

Following a long scolding session, they let her bathe, but Gritt kept an eye on the men while Ilse watched over her the whole way through.

The next day, Mitsuha woke up with the sunrise. The mercenaries had planned to go out and forage without any breakfast, then have a relatively filling brunch before hunting till evening. By the time they woke up, however, Mitsuha was already waiting for them with some water boiling on the micro camp stove beside her. *Good work, little guy! They would’ve needed to start a fire for this, but you’ve made it real easy.*

“Try these, please,” she said, presenting two boxes of fruit-flavored CalorieMates along with some tea. “They’re really nutritious, keep fresh for a long time, and are easy to carry around!”

Each of the four of them hesitantly took one and gave it a try.

“It’s delicious...” said Gritt.

“There ain’t much of it, but it feels... nutritious?” added Sven.

Nice, they like it! Oh, they want seconds? I don’t think so. They’ve got foraging and stuff to do, after all.

While the mercenaries left, Mitsuha stayed behind at camp. They didn’t stray very far, however, so it wasn’t a problem. *Huh? You’re wondering why I’m not going? I got bored of it, okay? Get off my case!*

They returned before midday, at about ten o’clock. Mitsuha was thoroughly prepared. She already had water boiling, so all there was left to do was throw in some noodles.

“Welcome back! I’m almost done cooking!”

They were rather used to it by now, so no one said anything back. A few minutes later, Mitsuha gave them a dish that looked a little like stew. But rather than giving them spoons, she handed each of them a fork.

“What’s this?” Sven asked.

“My family’s secret recipe! We call it ‘Bagged Ramen’!”

They “oohed” and “ahhed” appropriately.

Glad to see you can play along now.

“Oh, man, what *is* this stuff?!” Gritt said.

“It’s so good!” Sven joined in.

It feels like that’s all you ever say, Mitsuha thought bitterly. *Work on your vocabulary.* That wasn’t to say that instant ramen *wasn’t* great. It was cheap, warm, light, and easy to cook.

You know all those people who eat cup ramen every day and act like they’re totally broke? Fakers! All of them! If they were really poor, they’d go for the bagged stuff or some bread crusts. And let’s not forget bean sprouts! Those little guys used to be just 34 yen, but they’re just 26 now. Do companies even make any money off those?! Well, I can’t sell cup ramen to mercs, anyway... The packaging would probably break inside their bags.

But, hey, I’ve found a real power product! Now we’ll have a little post-brunch rest and start the main event—hunting!

Unlike when foraging, they didn’t split up and instead hunted as a single group. Everyone had a fighting style and range they were good at, so they picked the best person depending on what game they came across. Plus, larger prey was much easier to handle when they worked together. Some animals had to be herded or surrounded to be caught, while others were too tough for one person to take out. Such beasts could be worth as much as two gold, and one alone would make the trip a huge success.

The five of them quickly and quietly moved through the forest, keeping an eye out for prey. Their first target was a large bird perched in a tree overhead. Ilse took a shot at the animal, but missed.

“Sorry,” she said. Gritt patted her head, and they resumed their search.

Is that... a bird?

Despite being an amateur tracker, Mitsuha found another bird before anyone

else in the group. She crept closer to Sven, tapped on her crossbow, and whispered, “Can I have that one?”

Bows and arrows weren’t all that accurate to begin with, and considering the target was in a tree, the leaves and angles involved would make it even worse. Skilled as she was, Ilse would probably miss again.

Sven let her give it a try. She didn’t think he believed she could take it out—he probably just didn’t mind wasting an opportunity to satisfy his employer. The fact that she’d found it herself probably had something to do with it, too.

Well, whatever, Mitsuha thought. A grin slipped onto her face as she pulled back the crossbow string.

As an archer herself, Ilse seemed pretty curious about the horizontal contraption.



A sharp *twang* cracked through the air as the metal bolt flew out. It was

followed by the soft thud of the bird falling to the ground. The mercs couldn't believe what they were seeing. Ilse in particular was so dumbfounded she couldn't close her mouth.

Did I mention I actually had some crossbow training at the captain's base?

"That's going straight to the market. We're not eating it." Sven overcame his shock and made that point clear. A true leader, indeed.

A few more hours passed. Szep was carrying the bird Mitsuha had taken down. Gritt said he must've felt guilty about last night, but Mitsuha still couldn't make sense of his actions. *Well, whatever. We already agreed that anything we pick or catch here goes to them, so carrying it sure isn't my job.*

When they stopped for a short break, Mitsuha told them she was "going to pick some flowers" and headed off by herself.

"For decoration? I'll come with you," said one of the guys in a profound display of density. It earned him a whack from Gritt.

I have to go far enough to not be seen, heard, or smelled, and find solid ground that's slanted enough for it to flow in one ejection—I mean, direction! It's a "number one", okay?!

Huh? What's that rustling in the bush—whoa! Something just came outta there!

It was clearly a wild animal. The creature was pretty boar-like, but even if it wasn't a boar, Mitsuha's brain interpreted it as such. More importantly, it was glaring at her. Their eyes met.

Did I invade its territory? Or does it see me as prey? Ahem. Sweetie, I'm the one doing the hunting here, thank you very much.

It wasn't too big by boar industry standards... Not that Mitsuha knew whether something like that existed. *Is it a juvenile? A wild boar piglet? A boarlet? Well, it doesn't seem that small. It looks big enough to send little ol' me flying, at least. It's already got tusks, so maybe it'd stab me? Or would it ram into me after throwing me down? It doesn't look the least bit afraid, so maybe it's an adult?*

Before Mitsuha could finish her train of thought, the boar bellowed, pawed the dirt, and threatened her with a “ready to charge” pose. She felt no obligation to hang around and wait for it to launch.

My dad was from the sticks—uhh, I mean... the countryside. Specifically this one town where it wasn’t unheard of for the local newspaper to have headlines like “Local Boar Goes Ham on Car” and for foragers to get badly injured in boar attacks. Of course I know all too well that these animals aren’t to be messed with... I know exactly what to do!

“AAAAAAHHHHHHHH!”

She ran. Or rather, she skedaddled.

Boars can’t make sharp turns, so I just have to run to the si—HUH?! It’s still gaining on me! Dad, why would you lie about something so important?! Oh, yeah... He probably didn’t think I’d ever be chased by a boar. That probably never happened to him, either. He’d probably heard it and accepted it as fact without confirming it himself.

The boar wasn’t very nimble, but it gradually closed the distance between them whenever it had a straight path. It wouldn’t be long until it caught up. If that happened, Mitsuha would be in for much more than a world of pain... Its tusks were deadly. The forest was hardly a good place for running, either, so she quickly ran out of stamina. She felt as though she could trip at any moment.

This is bad! she panicked. But before she realized it, her right hand was reaching for the holster on her waist and pulling out a gun. It was the Beretta 93R—the handgun with the three-round burst mode. Her left hand joined in, setting it on semi-auto—the single-fire mode.

Dry, loud pops sounded off as she shot at the animal three times. There was a noticeable lack of echo; she wasn’t indoors, after all. There wasn’t much for the sounds to bounce off of.

The boar dropped dead on the spot. Only one of the three bullets had missed. *Good thing I’d changed to single-fire mode. I’d have been lucky to hit a single one in burst.*

What? You think using guns is unfair? Come on, now, it’s not like this is pro

wrestling and the boar is some heel. I'm lookin' to survive out here, not have some honorable "fight of the century" or whatever. Mitsuha rushed to grab two crossbow bolts from her quiver before shoving them into the boar's wounds.

"What happened?!" The mercenaries dashed onto the scene and came upon Mitsuha next to a boar with two bolts sticking out of it.

"O-Oh, it attacked me outta nowhere," she said. "I panicked and shot it, and it kinda worked out..."

Four pairs of eyes cast a suspicious look her way.

Ah, that's gotta be 'cause the crossbow wasn't that loud when I used it in front of them.

They took the boar and carried it back to camp, only to go out hunting again. Gritt stayed behind to gut the game and protect it from other animals. The rest of them went out, Mitsuha included. Ilse was an obvious choice, being the token archer, but it looked as though they now recognized Mitsuha as a valuable asset, too.

Ilse took out a rabbit and a bird, while Mitsuha shot only a single rabbit. She could've gotten two, but the second had run away when she missed. Quite a shame. Both rabbits and birds sold for a decent price, so they'd be going on the market. That was enough for the day, so the group returned to camp for the night.

By the time they arrived, Gritt was boiling some intestines. *Ahh, yeah. Those rot pretty quickly, so it makes sense that they'd eat them instead of taking them back. I bet it's a delicacy for these guys. I'll eat some, too, of course. I like intestines, and they're plenty nutritious.*

Everyone was in high spirits. Though they didn't catch a fox or anything else with an expensive pelt, the two rabbits, birds, and of course the boar more than made up for it. Their trip was a success, no question about it. There was also the mountain of herbs they'd picked over the last day or so, and they'd go hunting again tomorrow. All that combined with Mitsuha's reward would make for some good money. Probably not enough to get new weapons, but enough to take it easy for a while.

Even if it was intestines, everyone was excited for their first meat in a long time, and their laughter rang out until it was dark.

The next morning...

“Huh? Food? What are you talking about? You’re going hunting, then having brunch, and then we’re all going back to town, right? Why are you wasting time here?”

Saddened by Mitsuha’s cold response, the four trudged off.

Huh? Me? I’m looking after the camp. Hunting is super bori—I mean, I need to preserve energy for the trip back. I will *make something for them to eat, though.*

Since visibility was low, Mitsuha took the chance to properly arrange her inventory. She jumped back home with the items she wouldn’t use again, like the camp stove. She left them there, and instead picked up some spices, like salt, pepper, and other herbs.

I think I’ll boil the leftover intestines, she decided. If she brought back the camp stove, she wouldn’t get another chance to leave it at home, since everyone would be back by the time I was done. She decided to use Gritt’s stone stove.

The four came back way earlier than she’d expected. She was doubly surprised upon seeing the deer they’d brought with them. *No way, we’ve got venison now! The average American, sick of eating beef at every meal, will rush out of work for this legendary meat!*

This stuff’s worth a lot. Everyone looks happy as a lamb! Ugh, yeah, I know it’s “clam”. But really, how does that make any sense? Imagine a bunch of lambs just hopping around a pasture, grazing without a care in the world. That works better, doesn’t it? I mean, really, can clams even feel happiness?

Whoa, went off on a tangent there. Back to the matter at hand... What a waste of good intestines! I already made stew out of last night’s guts! We’ll have to throw away the ones from the deer, even though they’re obviously better... Then again, even if we started cooking them now, we’d be back really late, so we would’ve had to throw out its intestines regardless.

Everyone began carving up the deer. It was too heavy to bring back in one

piece, so they would only keep the parts worth selling. They threw away the innards, cut off its head, and set aside the antlers. The legs would be helpful in carrying it, so they tied them together using some ivy, then attached them to a branch so two people could lift and haul it. That was Sven's and Szep's job. Gritt and Ilse would carry the boar, of course. As for the birds and the rabbits... Well, Mitsuha was grateful she'd gotten rid of some of her things when she'd had the chance.

"It's so damn gooood!"

Of course it is! There's tons of spices in that! They pack a punch, don't they?! Eat up!

On the way back, Mitsuha became keenly aware of how heavy their spoils were. The others were having even more difficulty, but imagining their load as a sack full of coins was all they needed to keep on trucking. By the time they returned to town, it was already dark. They'd had to take many breaks on the way.

The next day, Mitsuha met them in front of the mercenary guild. By the time she arrived, they'd already sold the game to the guild. Mitsuha signed the paper saying that they'd completed her request and gave them an "A" rating, which they were quite pleased with. The guild gave Sven the one gold coin they were promised, and he tucked it away with great care. That was half a month's worth of modest food and rent in a cheap room, which was pretty big.

What was even bigger, though, was the party they were about to have. They'd decided to celebrate their successful trip out in the wilderness. Between the earnings from the game and the herbs, the mercenaries could afford to have a good time. Additionally, they likely thought that getting close to Mitsuha would be beneficial, so this clearly wouldn't be a waste of money.

Mitsuha had been too exhausted to even have dinner the night before. They were most likely the same on that front, and just like her, they probably hadn't eaten anything in the morning to leave room for the party food. All five of them were hungry as bears, so not wasting any more time, they headed to their favorite place.

It's only midday, but hey, it's five o'clock somewhere, right?

“Here’s to our success!” Mitsuha raised her ale.

“CHEERS!” all four of them shouted back.

After the toast, they ordered more and more food and enjoyed some leisurely chit-chat. They talked about the hunt, the food... that sort of thing. None of the mercenaries mentioned the crossbow. In all likelihood, they assumed Mitsuha didn’t want to talk about it. An employer was entitled to her own private matters, so they didn’t dig any deeper.

Among mercenaries, there were some lowlifes who cared for nothing so long as they got paid, but Sven’s group was on the other side of the spectrum. They took the mercenary rules to heart, because if they didn’t, they couldn’t complain when someone else broke them.

“Anyway, the... ramen? And uhh, CalorieMates? Those are pretty good,” said Gritt.

“Yep, they really are,” Mitsuha nodded.

“Your little stove was really useful, too, but looked like a pain to carry around. I think it’s better to just use makeshift stone stoves. That thing’s expensive, too, isn’t it? It uses fuel, and if it breaks, then you’re outta luck.”

“Oh, yeah.” Mitsuha had learned a great deal from this trip and had a good time, too. *If only carrying stuff back wasn’t so har—Ah!* “Hey, don’t you think it’d be great if you could carry more stuff?”

“Well, of course. We could take more game with us, so we’d obviously earn more. But we can’t buy a carriage or anything like that. The maintenance costs waaay too much. Just getting one carriage and some horses would cost us an arm and a leg.”

At that moment, a certain search result came back to Mitsuha. It said “Foldable Aluminum Bike Trailer, Non-Bursting Tires: 37,900 yen”. *If they bring one of these on their trips... The possibilities are endless!*

“Hey, does that lighting stick cost a lot?” Gritt asked.

“Oh, not really. Especially the smaller ones. They can be used hundreds of times, and they cost less than a silver.”

“HUHH?!” Gritt and Ilse were dumbfounded.

Yeah, I got them in sets at the discount store. Each one probably had a value of about a small silver each. With my store’s insane profit margins, that’d be one silver. Also, why are the girls the only ones surprised? Mitsuha wondered. *Oh, I get it, they’re the only ones handling fire and food, huh? I see how it is.*

The chatter went on and on, but Mitusha didn’t mind. She found the conversation topics both fun and useful. Suddenly, she remembered something.

“Oh yeah, look at this,” she said, taking a magazine from her bag and placing it on the table. “Remember how you said I was being reckless on the first night? Look! Where I come from, it’s pretty normal to wear *this* when swimming!”

The four opened the magazine and immediately gaped at the content. Men and women of all ages clad in swimsuits were making merry in pools and beaches. A seductive bombshell in a bikini gazed out at them from one of the... *special* pages.

The group was frozen at the sight. Except Szep, whose shaking hands were flipping through the pages on some sort of autopilot.

“No way...” said Gritt.

“Th-This is just...” Sven couldn’t even form a sentence.

Ilse had no words.

Szep, however, was pretty talkative. “Hey, these are just pictures, right? They’re detailed, yeah, but this can’t be real! A heaven like this just... can’t exist...”

Yesterday evening, Mitsuha had jumped back to Earth. It had been a struggle, considering how tired she was, but she’d dragged herself to a secondhand bookstore and purchased a gravure magazine, which was full of sexy photography. Mitsuha had made sure it was both cheap and impactful. Her nation’s honor had been on the line, after all.

Man, even though I changed before I went in there, I still totally reeked. No wonder I got all those weird looks. There was that old guy with a mean look in his eyes... He stared daggers at me like the smell of blood made him get

flashbacks or something. What was his problem?! Ugh, I really should've taken a bath...

After the party was over, Mitsuha and the mercenaries said their goodbyes and that they hoped to work together again. One of them tried to ask more about her crossbow, but the others got in the way. With that chapter over, she went back to her store.

Man, I close up way too often. I'll really have to open up tomorrow, she thought.

Before they had parted ways, Szep had inquired about the magazine. It had served its purpose, so Mitsuha had let him keep it.

A few days later, Mitsuha returned to the place where they'd had their little gathering. She had really enjoyed their food. *Even I like eating out every now and again. Cooking for myself too often always drains my veggie supplies, so saving them is nice, too.*

The four mercs happened to be there, as well. Upon seeing her, however, they jumped as though she were a ghost. *What the hell's up with that attitude?!*

"Hey, it's been a while. What's wrong?"

"Ah, nothing, just, uh..."

That was when she noticed that they had different gear.

"Huh? You got new weapons? Congratulations!"

"W-WE'RE SORRYYYY!" The four of them bowed down and apologized in unison.

Uhh... What? Oh, they sold the gravure magazine to the fourth son of a noble for seven gold coins? That's just fine and dandy. I gave it to them for free 'cause I didn't need it. I didn't care whether they threw it out or sold it.

Reselling something I didn't know the value of probably made them feel guilty, like they swindled me or something, but really, I'm not bothered by it at all. Then again, for me to make seven gold, I'd have to sell 140 generic shampoos. I sold them for eight silver each, but only five of that was profit. And these four went and made it all with just a single resale, huh?

No, really, it's fine. I don't think much of it. Seriously. Honest. I do feel like I might be popping a blood vessel and that my smile's a little stiff, but that's probably just my imagination. They look kinda pale... and like they're shivering, huh? Nah, gotta be my imagination.

"All right! You're buying my lunch!" she declared.

"Y-Yes ma'am!"



Mitsuha went on to enjoy a long stretch of peace. The country she was in

became her second home. She was fairly safe in this world, and the people were kind. The world had its share of bad seeds, but the same was true for Earth.

Don't fret the details or you'll go bald, I always say!

She aimed to acclimate at her own pace, then think of a way to strike it rich. For now, she was leading a comfortable life and had all the time in the world.

I'm gonna take it easy and bring happiness to everyone!

...Ah, so there *was* a time when she'd believed that, wasn't there? Well, it's not as though you could blame her. She had only known of this one, relatively prosperous nation, after all. There was no way she could have noticed the shady activities of its neighbors or seen the writing on the wall that said *war was coming.*

Mitsuha spent her days blissfully unaware of the political intrigue, never sensing the oncoming danger...

EXTRA: EASY MONEY MITSUHA WAS LOST IN THOUGHT.

Maybe I really should find a way to make some quick and easy money. Once or twice wouldn't hurt, right?

Although she was getting a steady income from the (overpriced) products she sold as a store owner and the information (and overpriced ingredients) she provided as a consultant, Mitsuha wasn't really satisfied with the speed at which her wealth was growing. It was for this reason she had started brainstorming some get-rich-quick schemes.

Cooking's a no-no. I'd be so busy, I wouldn't have time for anything else. Working all the way from morning till evening would be way too tiring for my liking. Besides that, I can't do anything that'll mess with this world's natural progression, sell anything that could be used for war or crime, or anything else that would throw this world's politics or economy into chaos.

These limitations didn't leave her with many options.

There has to be something, though. Wait, I've got it! The four mercs got seven gold for the gravure mag I gave them! That means I can make a killing selling porn—I mean, romance magazines!

There were no scientific, distributional, or economic problems with those, so it wouldn't mess up the world. Both buyer and seller would be satisfied, and no one would have a problem with it. It seemed like the perfect idea.

She decided to investigate her potential clients and find out what kind of prices to set. Needless to say, the best person to start with was Szep—the one who already had a high score of selling a gravure mag to a noble.

"So yeah, I'm thinking of selling these," Mitsuha said, presenting one of the magazines. She was in the eatery Sven's group frequented. Once there, she'd quickly located the mercenaries.

Upon seeing the porn—apologies, *romance magazine*, all four of them froze. Unlike the one she had shown them last time, this magazine was overtly erotic.

Though not enough so to be “18 and up”.

“Think you can point me to somebody who’d buy—”

Before she could finish her sentence, Szep—who was standing behind her—clamped a hand over her mouth.

“Guh, mmgh! Grrrmgh...!”

An instant later, she shouted, “Why the hell’d you do that?!”

Sven was profusely apologizing, while Szep made a disheartened face. There was a five-fingered mark on his left cheek.

“I-I did it for your safety, you know?” Szep made the same excuse as always, but Mitsuha’d had enough of it.

I know he’s not lying; he really did do it for my sake. But there are limits! You don’t just grab a girl from behind and cover her mouth! Hmph!

According to Szep, the first gravure magazine had become such a hot topic among the nobles that it had actually reached the royal palace. Some wanted to know its source, others demanded more copies, others still offered to buy the one she’d brought. Eventually, things had escalated to the point that even the church got involved. They could now declare it heretical, take and use it themselves, or demand the rights to it. Regardless, getting involved with it wasn’t a smart move at this point.

Out of respect for Szep and a desire to monopolize, the guy he’d sold the magazine to hadn’t let anything slip, but it was possible he’d tell someone about Szep someday. If that were to happen, Szep planned to say that he’d gotten it off a wandering merchant and had no idea where the man had come from or where he’d gone. If Mitsuha were to put something similar on the market, Szep’s protective lie would be pointless. Thus, he’d done his best to silence her, even if it meant using force.

Man, this sucks, Mitsuha thought. *I was planning to sell the mags through Szep. As in, without any official involvement from my store. I don’t mind selling p... romance mags in secret, but I don’t want my store to be known for that kind of stuff. My establishment is wholesome! I sell children’s toys, not adults’ toys!*

In any case, it looked as though Mitsuha had no choice but to give up on this venture. *It was such a great idea, too. What a shame. Oh well, it's best if I just let it go and move on to something else!*

Hmm... People in this world can't read books from my world, and I can't sell anything with pictures or photos depicting progress they haven't made yet...

I guess I could copy and sell famous paintings from Earth, but even if this is another world, I'd feel bad for the original artists. Mechanical copies of true art are nothing but sacrilege. It's nothing like making derivative works, like translations, adaptations, and so on.

Maybe I could try that? No. I don't have the time or the talent for it. I can't draw, carve, sculpt, or—HEY, THAT'S IT!

A few days later, Mitsuha wound up in a quarry during the night. She was focused on mining stone suitable for sculpting. If you're wondering why she was in such a dangerous place alone, at such a late hour no with no tools in hand, don't worry... You'll find out soon enough.

"Hrmmm... Venus de Milo with arms, Venus de Milo with arms... C'mon!" Mitsuha repeated this strange mantra, touched the rock face, and jumped back home to Japan, bringing a chunk of it with her. Right away, she arrived in her garage. Filled with anticipation, she turned to the rock she'd brought along, expecting to see a complete Venus de Milo, but...

"WHAT THE HELL?!" What she saw was a vaguely feminine creature with arms at such disturbing angles that it's better we don't describe them here. Let's just say that if you saw this thing at night, you'd immediately run.

"Nike with a head, Nike with a head... Come oooon!"

...Why'd she end up as a harpy? This has to be because I'm trying to imagine something that isn't there and impose it on the result. That means I have to go for something that's already complete! Aren't I a clever girl?

"The Thinker, The Thinker... Come on!"

He was sitting on a toilet with an expression of pure ecstacy. This was no "Thinker". In fact, it didn't look like he was thinking anything at all.

“David! Come on!”

“The Little Mermaid! Come ooon!”

“The Statue of Libertyyyy!”

Mitsuha had completely forgotten how dreadful she was at drawing and, well, any other kind of art.

Weird, since I’m pretty good at die cutting... Anyway, I’ll have to think of something else. I can’t keep these freaky statues at home, though. If anyone sees them, they’re gonna think I’m in the cult of some evil god.

With that, Mitsuha brought them back to the general store.

“Excuse me, how much for this one?”

Yay! A customer! What’s he buying—Huh...?

“This evil-warding monster sculpture is so well-made. The ugliness, the eerieness... Most magnificent!”

Mitsuha sold it for quite a lot but didn’t feel happy in the least.

Whatever, I’ll just think of something else! Moving on!

AFTERWORD HELLO, MY NAME IS FUNA. THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING THIS BOOK!

This is my third work to get published, with *Didn't I Say To Make My Abilities Average In The Next Life?!* (Earth Star Novel) being the first, and *I Shall Survive Using Potions!* (Kodansha's K Light Novels) being the second. However, this was actually the first work I uploaded to the web novel site, Shosetsuka ni Naro (I uploaded *Potions* alongside it, but *80K* started a day earlier).

Just like *Potions*, *80K* concluded without anyone ever coming to license it. But right when I thought these works would be forgotten by society and live on only within my heart, I suddenly got an offer to turn both into light novels and manga! That even led to me resuming the web novels...

The works that were the foundation for publishing the younger *Average Abilities* have now caught up and stand beside it... I don't have words to express just how moved I am. This is all thanks to those who supported these works while I was still uploading them and during the year after I was done. Thank you so much!

Now, I can only hope that you, dear reader, can become the reason the next volumes see the light of day...

Please watch K Light Novel for new releases for both *I Shall Survive Using Potions!* and *Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for my Retirement*! Do it for the new volumes... and my ambitions...

And please check out the webcomic magazine, Suiyoubi no Sirius, for both! (http://seiga.nicovideo.jp/manga/official/w_sirius/) New *Potions* chapters come out on the first and third Wednesdays of the month, while *80K*'s come out on the second and fourth! You basically have a "Weekly FUNA" thing going on there!

Welcome to FUNAFUNA World!



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