
Saving
80,000
Gold
in
Another
World
for My
Retirement
7
Story by
FUNA
Art by
Keisuke
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“Bozes County Caravan No. 2, move out!”


"Five people would be perfect..."
"Five people? What do you mean?"
"You and Colette and me makes three. I have a bunch of candidates for the last two spots, including Beatrice, Lephilia, Micchan 2.0, and Princess Kak-Kak-Kak... I suppose a girl from the orphanage will do too..."
"What are you talking about?!"
"Oh, I was thinking about my party, or team, if you will. I'm thinking it should be five members."
"I'll join! I'll join!"

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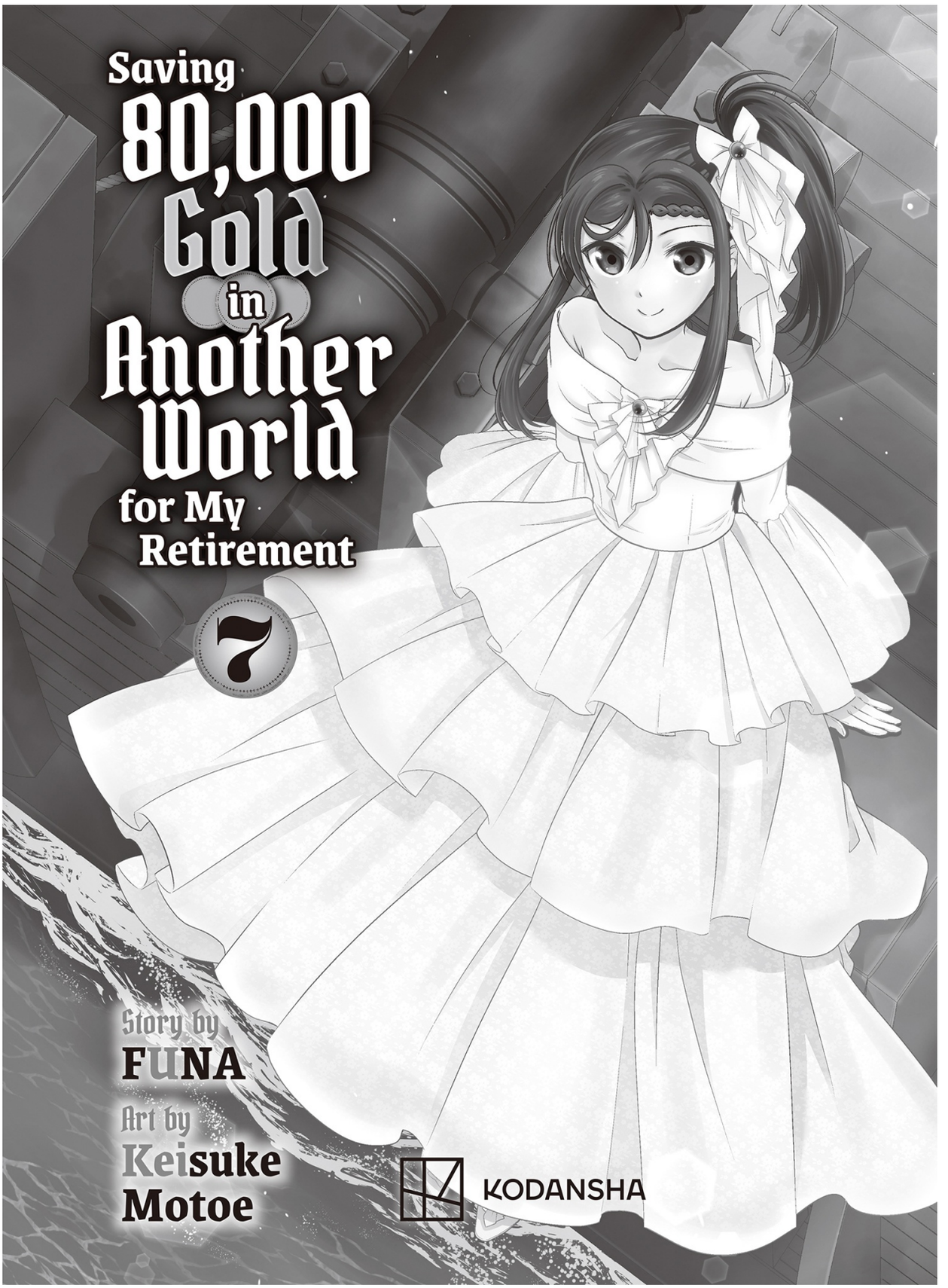
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Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 7

A VERTICAL Book

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Chapter 72:
Caravan

“Wh… Wh-Wh-Why?! What were they thinking…?” Mitsuha was dumbstruck.

“Mother and Father said it’d be a good experience for me, and that I’d be perfectly safe with you by my side!” said Beatrice.

Damn it! thought Mitsuha. *They tricked me! They knew I wouldn’t let her go on such a dangerous journey alone!*

Mitsuha couldn’t allow a fourteen-year-old girl to spend ten days traveling with a caravan full of grimy men. Beatrice and her parents knew that and counted on her to step up and volunteer to accompany the caravan. With Mitsuha on board, Beatrice could be rescued from any dangers with a quick world-jump. It was as safe as a trip could be.

This will probably be the first and last big adventure of Beatrice’s life, and her safety is practically guaranteed. Plus, she’ll get a chance to deepen her bond with me. All wins, no losses for the Bozes family.

I’ve been played!

The odds of getting mobbed by bandits were low, and only the weakest monsters appeared on their route. But no matter how little risk the journey presented, there was always a possibility that something could go wrong. The possibility of harm befalling Beatrice wasn’t zero; Mitsuha couldn’t condone that.

Besides, Beatrice is really freakin' cute. If she traveled alone with such a large group of men, a couple of them might get bad ideas.

It was, admittedly, unlikely that anyone would assault her. Even the biggest idiot knew that the Bozeses would invest all their military and financial might to hunt down anyone who harmed their little girl to the end of the earth and make them pay. Torturing and slaughtering every last one of the culprit's family and associates were expected.

So yeah, I don't think anything's gonna happen. But you know. Beatrice is adorable. I wouldn't be surprised if someone made an indecent move like poking her cheeks or grazing her hair from behind—actually, that's a guarantee! I know for a fact at least one person will try it!

…That person's gonna be me.

Wait, no! Bad thoughts, Mitsuha!

Anyway. Can I get out of this somehow…?

"Nope, you can't," answered Beatrice.

Really? Damn.

"Wait, how did you…" Mitsuha whispered.

"You said all that out loud."

Oops…

The Bozes County Caravan No. 2 was ready for departure. Mitsuha's custom carriage—pulled by her white horse Silver—brought up the rear. She'd jumped Silver and the carriage

to Bozes County from the capital. The caravan wagons were all loaded up but, as you'd expect, wagons lacked advanced suspension or soft cushion seating. Mitsuha wanted no part in horseback-riding on a cheap saddle or trekking alongside the wagons; her legs and hips weren't built for that kind of labor.

That meant it was time to summon Silver, who rarely made an appearance these days, and her custom-made carriage from Earth. The one-horse carriage was lightweight and would only carry two passengers: Mitsuha and Beatrice. The stallion would have no trouble keeping up with the loaded wagons.

Silver seemed more fervent for the quest than anyone else. He was well-fed and given plenty of exercise at the farm Mitsuha entrusted him to, but he must've been ecstatic to finally be of service to his original owner.

Maybe I should visit the farm more often and take him out for strolls instead of calling for him only when he's needed…

"Bozes County Caravan No. 2, move out!" Beatrice ordered with vigor.

"YES, MA'AM!" saluted the merchants and guards.

They were amped up, and Mitsuha could see why; traveling with and protecting the county lord's daughter was an honorable duty most would never receive in their lifetime. Count Bozes was a benevolent ruler and well-respected by his people. These men were willing to protect Beatrice with their life. *That said, not even*

Count Bozes would spare a guard's life if he were to abandon Beatrice to save himself…

Merchants were also accompanying the caravan. In fact, the trip was organized by the merchants of Bozes County. Technically speaking, Count Bozes was the trip's director and their employer. It was a well-paying gig and they'd even have a chance to make connections with other merchants in the capital. They were basically the county's finest vendors, hand-selected by the lord. Getting a spot on the caravan was highly competitive.

There would've been no reason for merchants to be on board if making a delivery was the caravan's only task, but they were also expected to handle business negotiations in the capital as well. Some of them were the business owners themselves who'd entrusted their shop to their head clerks before they set out, and were fired up to take the capital by storm; they never could've imagined that their tiny rural companies would be given the chance to sell imports from none other than the Lightning Archpriestess's homeland. They were all gung-ho to overwhelm the big retailers of the capital with their bulletproof sales pitches.

Some of the merchants were repeaters from the first Bozes County caravan, while others were new. Count Bozes wanted to give a chance to as many merchants as he could rather than appoint those he personally favored. *He's such a good lord,* lauded Mitsuha.

There was one unfortunate consequence of the merchants' presence…

“Right this way, Lady Beatrice!” one of them called out.

Typically, a caravan crew’s lunch breaks were short. They spent just enough time to grab a light meal before resuming their journey. Spending time and funds on lunch wasn’t ideal. It was important to cover as much distance as they could during the day, and no one was dumb enough to ride a wobbly wagon on a full stomach. That went double for the guards who needed to be ready to fight at any moment. Any guard who lacked that common sense wouldn’t have been hired by this caravan.

Despite that, the caravan was making a stop for lunch. After a very long wait, Beatrice and Mitsuha were finally summoned by one of the merchants. The girls followed him to a folding table set with a white tablecloth, a teapot, and cups. There were also plates of what looked like hors d’oeuvres.

“…Is that all?” Beatrice asked, looking disappointed.

“Worry not, my lady! This is only the beginning. We’ve prepared a luxurious multi-course meal that I’m sure will be to your liking.” The merchant grinned widely.

Bzzzt! Big mistake, buddy! You don’t get Beatrice at all, do you? Although to be fair, he only met her this morning.

“Will everyone in the caravan be treated to this meal?” Beatrice asked.

Fat chance of that…

“N-No, of course not… The course meals will only be for you and Viscountess Yamano, accompanied by two merchants. We will take turns receiving the honor of dining with you. The rest of

the caravan will eat the usual," the merchant explained as if it were obvious.

"In that case… You there!" Beatrice pointed to one of the guards. "Yes, you. Come over here."

The guard in his mid-twenties looked dumbfounded to be addressed by the adorable young boss of the caravan and pointed at himself to make sure she was actually talking to him.

He was sitting on the ground in front of a plate of some hardtack and scraps of meat, a wooden bowl full of vegetables, and a cup of soup. His food was untouched because he and the other men thought it'd be rude to start eating before their boss, even if she was being served an entirely different meal. The merchant had no idea what Beatrice was thinking, but he hastily beckoned the guard over. The young man left his food behind and approached timidly, wondering if he'd angered Beatrice in some way.

Beatrice turned to the young guard and said, "Take my place and eat with the merchants. I will have the meal you left over there."

"…Huh?" The two merchants and the guard gaped at her. Their brains were having a hard time processing what she just said.

They're unfamiliar in the ways of Beatrice. Which isn't really their fault…

"Wh-What do you…" One of the merchants finally started to reboot.

“I forced Father into allowing me to accompany this caravan—knowing I’d be a burden to you all—for one reason: to experience what it’s like to be a member of this venture. I want to go through the same hardships as everyone else so I can figure out how to improve efficiency and make your lives easier. Giving me special treatment would defeat the purpose! And I was told the reason we left before dawn today was in hopes of shortening the journey by one day. Don’t tell me you wasted time preparing a luxurious multi-course meal.”

“Uh… Uhm…” The merchant went pale.

That’s Beatrice for you. She can be a bit selfish because of her pampered noble upbringing, but she’s Count Bozes and Lady Iris’s daughter through and through. She also grew up with Theodore and Alexis, the former of whom is so sweet and intelligent, and the latter is usually a silly try-hard who turns into a dreamy hero when you need him mos—wait, you didn’t hear that last part!

…Anyway, Beatrice has had great examples to follow from an early age. That sets her apart from the other spoiled noble girls.

“Well, then…” Mitsuha chimed in. “Hey, you! Come over here! And leave your plates and cup where they are.” She pointed to a grizzled man who looked to be in his mid-thirties. He trudged over to her reluctantly. *I would’ve been fine with the course meal, personally, but that ain’t an option now. Too bad…*

Beatrice warned the merchants, “From now on, please don’t waste time or go to any extra trouble for my sake. I’m going to eat the same food and live the same way as you. If you’ll excuse me.”

She walked over to the young guard's lunch and sat down. She was in durable, comfortable clothes instead of the usual fancy dress, so sitting on the ground was no problem.

Mitsuha took the older man's food and settled down with Beatrice. The guards who were sitting around them looked stupefied.

"Let's dig in, everyone!" Beatrice said cheerily. Finally, it was time to eat.

When the merchant summoned the two girls for lunch earlier, his exact words were "Right this way, Lady Beatrice!" No mention of Mitsuha. That was no accident. Mitsuha may have been the Lightning Archpriestess and a viscountess, but to these men, she was nothing more than the leader of a neighboring territory. Beatrice, on the other hand, was the daughter of *their* lord—Count Bozes—who was also the man who directed this caravan and supplied its inventory. They all knew how much he doted on her, and she was also going to be the one to report to him once the journey was over. That was why she was being treated with greater respect; if she mentioned a merchant as particularly reliable and trustworthy to her father, it would transform his career. The same was true if she singled out anyone as disagreeable.

So yeah, it's obvious why she's a higher priority than me. Buttering up to a low-ranking noble from the next county over won't earn them a single copper coin.

That didn’t mean the merchants were mistreating Mitsuha. She *was* the Lightning Archpriestess, savior of the kingdom, after all. But they assumed that she was used to long carriage rides because of the treaty expedition, whereas Beatrice—young and delicate as she appeared—was not. They couldn’t be blamed for tripping over themselves to take care of the little noblewoman. Even Mitsuha shared that urge.

Anyway, the pair of merchants looked dejected as they slumped down to eat with the two guards. They were likely planning to use this mealtime as an opportunity to make small talk with the adorable Beatrice and win her good graces, but now they were stuck with a couple of grown guardsmen. Talk about a letdown.

Keep your chin up, guys!

Beatrice spent the lunch break talking to the guards and asking questions. She could chat with Mitsuha all she wanted in the carriage, so it made sense she’d ignore her for now and prioritize learning what she could from the crew.

Beatrice probably wanted to go on this journey for fun, but that definitely wasn’t all. She was well aware of her duties and how learning more about the caravan could help her with the position she’d been entrusted with.

By the end of the lunch break, Beatrice had gathered a lot of information like what the greatest difficulties of the travels were, what improvements the men wanted to see, the number of staff they felt was appropriate for a trip, and more. She spoke to each

person and got them to share their feelings by playing up the innocent and girlish persona, which was way more effective than a formal survey.

She's much savvier than I thought…

"I guess no matter how safe a journey may seem, you can't cut down on the number of guards or hire less experienced people for cheap to save money… I should've known," said a brooding Beatrice. Lunch was over; they were back in the carriage and on the road.

"Yeah," nodded Mitsuha. "It's pretty common for companies to suffer heavy losses after cutting expenses. You should always factor in safety measures when people are involved. Human lives are invaluable."

"Hmm, that makes sense…" Beatrice said, thinking on her friend's words.

The girl was more mature than Mitsuha imagined. They'd only ever discussed gossip, games, places to eat—things that had nothing to do with running a business. Mitsuha knew that Beatrice was a mature kid, but she hadn't had a chance until now to recognize that she had an impressive work ethic.

What was I like at fourteen? I think I was in my second or third year of middle school… Uh, yikes. My fourteen-year-old self was nowhere near *as put-together as she is!*

"Oh, by the way…" Beatrice said.

"Hm? What is it?"

“My debutante ball is next year. You’re already planning for it, right?”

Grk!

“I believe you promised me fiery flowers that bloom in the sky, parade wagons that flash with light, food stands, souvenir booths, and a few more…”

Mitsuha screamed internally.

Oh, for the love of… How does she remember all that?! I told her those things just to get her off my back, assuming she would forget it all! Crap… I only have a year to figure it out.

“**Sergeant Thunder, this is Home One, over!**”

A voice gurgled from a wireless radio. It was Colette. This campaign was going to keep Mitsuha away from her county for nearly ten days, so she made sure to be reachable in case of an emergency. She installed an HF transceiver and a battery inside the carriage, and solar panels on the roof as well as a broadband antenna for mobile devices. *It’s amazing how far technology has come…*


わたあめ
やきとり
かき氷

If the battery died, Mitsuha could jump to her house in Japan and grab a spare. She installed the radio for emergencies but she didn't tell anyone not to contact her otherwise. Colette's voice sounded calm, so this likely wasn't an emergency. *It's probably just a courtesy call.*

Mitsuha picked up the mic that was hooked to the side of the radio and answered, "This is Sergeant Thunder."

"**Why do we need these dumb code names, Mitsuha? 'Mitsuha, this is Colette' should be good enough!**"

It's not about need, it's about form. I'm not budging on that.

"No, it's not. You have to use the code names. But I guess we can speak normally after the opening lines." She was fine with making that compromise. "So, what do you need?"

"**Nothing. I'm just making a courtesy call. I was wondering what you're up to…**"

I knew it. But you're not supposed to admit that it's a courtesy call… Mitsuha thought, but didn't complain. She knew Colette was in friend mode instead of vassal mode; she called her by her first name instead of her title. The little girl was probably sulking because her friend was going on a trip with Beatrice and not her. Colette was aware that Mitsuha had joined the caravan for work, but seeing her leave with Beatrice in a custom-made carriage probably reminded her of the girls' trip on the *Good Ship Lollipop* for the treaty expedition. *She* always *comes with me to the New World. And that's still not enough…?*

"Well, I'm just—"

Mitsuha felt a clench on her shoulder.

“Wh-Whoa?!” she jerked.

Beatrice was glowering at her with wrath in her eyes.

“…What is that?” asked Beatrice.

What?

“Why is Colette’s voice coming out of it?!”

Oh…

“D-Did I never tell you about radios?”

“No, you didn’t…”

I can feel the sky rumbling… A lightning bolt is about to strike me! And I’m *the one people call the Lightning Archpriestess… Oh, I really screwed up this time!*

Now that Mitsuha thought about it, she’d told Sabine and the royal family about radios, but not the Bozeses. She also told a few people on the treaty expedition, but made it clear that it was a state secret and they were forbidden from disclosing it to anyone. Radios would change the foundation of the world if knowledge of their existence became widespread; being able to instantly convey information over hundreds of miles would have an unfathomable impact on military, political, business matters, and so much more.

Although radios don’t have much of a shock value for anyone who knows about my Traversal ability.

At any rate, Mitsuha had been keeping the existence of radios close to the vest and it seemed like even Count Bozes hadn’t heard. She didn’t mind him knowing about them. She actually

assumed he'd at least heard of them since she used one to communicate with the king when the invading fleet arrived in Yamano County. *Or maybe he does know but didn't tell his family. Sharing state secrets with your children would be pretty irresponsible…*

Further stoking the flames of Beatrice's ire was the fact that Colette was a lowly commoner. She was probably doubtful of Mitsuha's claim that she was a vassal candidate. Colette was just a plain girl from a small village in Bozes County, after all. Beatrice seemed to think that Mitsuha simply adopted her and began educating her as a reward for saving her life, and was only calling her a vassal candidate to make her feel at home.

So not only did Mitsuha tell a commoner about this magical item from her land, but she even gave her one of her own. Beatrice saw herself as Mitsuha's best friend—above Colette and Sabine—and yet she wasn't even told about the tool that could "talk with Mitsuha from anywhere, at any time."

This is bad. Really, really bad. What if Beatrice learns that Sabine knows about radios too and *has her own set? Bad doesn't even begin to describe this!*

This is dangerous. Really, really dangerous. Crap, I need to do something…

Installing a radio in the Bozes mansion was not an option. That would enable Count Bozes and the king to communicate in real time, which was not something this world was ready for. Suppose they made plans that depended on the existence of the

radio and then something happened to Mitsuha. Then what? All it would take was one little malfunction or a dead battery or a broken solar panel for the whole plan to collapse. It'd be a disaster if they formed a military defense strategy that relied on instant communication.

Mitsuha wanted radios to be used for personal communication with herself and no one else. If she was the only person anyone could contact, no one would be inconvenienced if she disappeared from this world and the radios ceased to function.

The treaty expedition was an exception. The safety of the delegation was the top priority.

There's also the one I gave to Princess Remia. That one was only being used as an emergency line and for her to play games and chit-chat with Sabine, so it wouldn't matter if it broke one day. If Mitsuha was no longer around to jump to her aid, there'd be no reason for Remia to have a radio. She was fine with giving out the device as long as it only had one purpose and would be rendered pointless the moment she disappeared. It'd take the people of this world centuries to figure out how to reproduce them, and the devices would probably be forgotten by then.

If Mitsuha ever left this world of her own accord, she planned to take all the radios and solar panel systems with her. That included the advanced technology in Mitsuha's General Store and her county residence. *I already collected all the radios and solar panels used for the treaty expedition when the main*

delegation returned. Actually, some of them are being reused on this carriage.

"**…tsuha! Answer me, Mitsuha!**"

Oh, right. I was talking to Colette…

"S-Something came up, okay? I'll talk to you later!" Mitsuha sputtered.

"**Huh? Oh, okay… 10-4.**"

"Threes and eights!"

"**What?**"

"Uh, nothing… 10-10!"

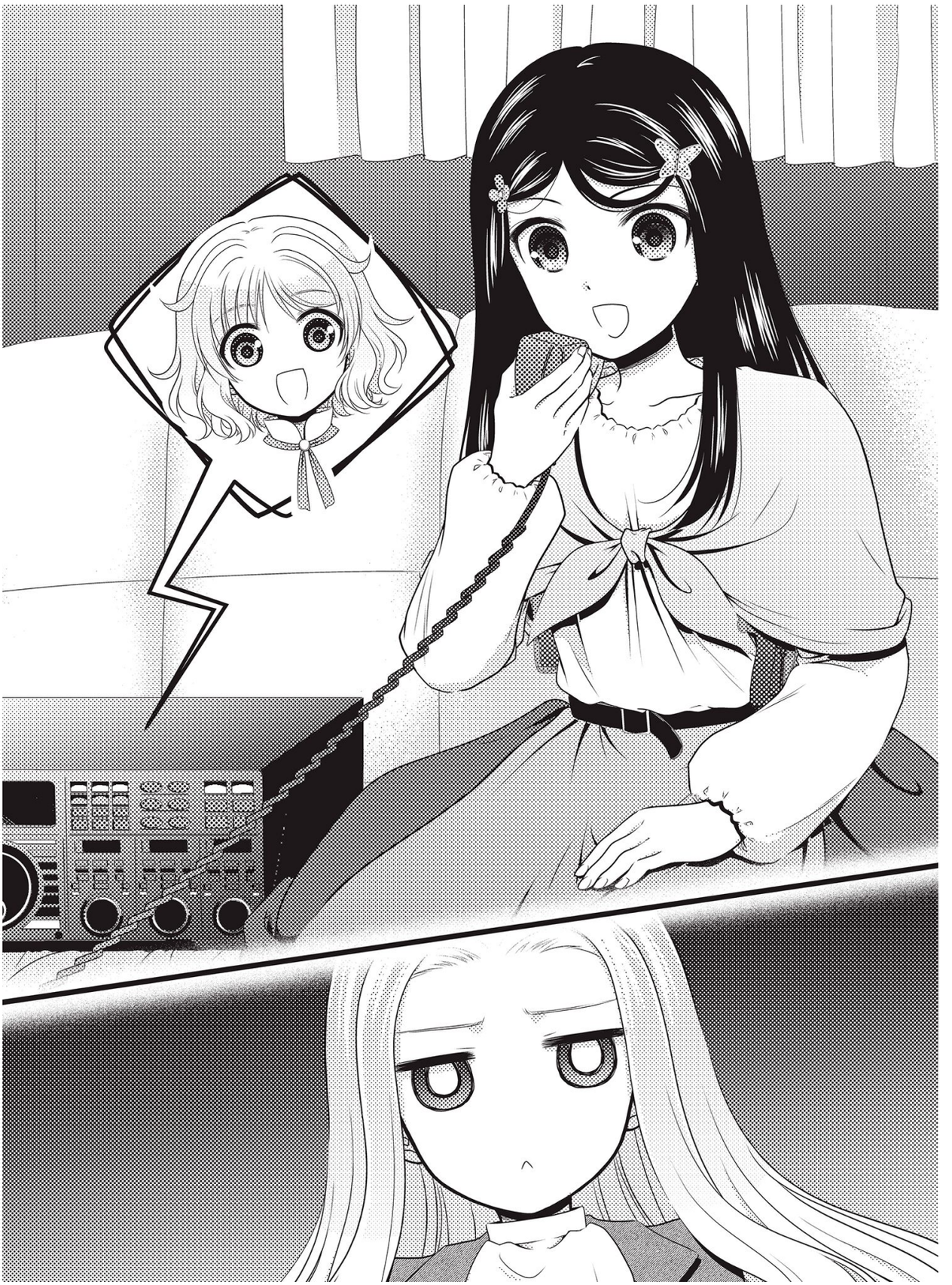
I taught Colette ten-codes. That's not an amateur radio thing. It's mostly used over Citizens Band radio and by emergency personnel, but whatever. It's fun.

Colette took the hint that something occurred on Mitsuha's end and quickly hung up.

Back to the problem at hand…

"That was Colette's voice, wasn't it?"

Beatrice had only met Colette recently when she started coming over to the Yamano County residence. They were both from Bozes County, but there was no way a daughter of the lord would've met a peasant from a rural village. Bozes County was way bigger than the tiny Yamano County that was home to only seven hundred people. A count's daughter wasn't gonna go out for strolls and meet all the common folk in a territory that large.



She had many more chances to speak to Colette since she started spending time at Mitsuha's residence. The muffled radio speaker didn't mask the owner of the voice.

"…What. Is. That?" Beatrice repeated. She stared with the look of what you'd often describe as "dead-fish eyes" in manga.

Oh, damn it! I can't escape this!

"I see. So not just Colette, but Princess Sabine too," Beatrice said in a low, monotonous tone. Her cold dead eyes were fixed on Mitsuha.

…She's really scaring me!

Mitsuha decided to go ahead and confess everything. Beatrice was unquestionably going to put the screws on Colette when she got the chance, and Colette wouldn't be able to hold out against her grilling. If Mitsuha's lies were to be exposed in the process, it would've been a debacle. If the girl ended up interrogating Sabine too… The very thought made Mitsuha shiver. 'Fessing up now was definitely for the best.

She was also hoping that Sabine knowing about radios would quell Beatrice's anger a bit. It might make her feel better to know that someone above her rank was let in on the secret too, as opposed to just one commoner.

There's no rank among my friends, of course! And that includes Colette. We're all equal here. Except for on formal occasions.

It'd be a problem if Beatrice found out about Earth or the New World, but Mitsuha trusted her with the secret of the radio.

She knew the girl wouldn't betray her. A number of people already knew about the radios anyway. The king and his people, the delegation leader Count Colbmein, his advisor Clarge Kardebolt, and all the court ladies and maids that accompanied them abroad were aware.

The court ladies and maids were from respectable families, so there was no risk of them blabbing. As daughters of lesser nobles or high-ranking bureaucrats, they understood that betraying the country by leaking a state secret would result not only in their own execution, but cause great trouble for their families as well. The nobles and merchants of this world would rather commit suicide than do anything to harm their kin. As such, most of them were likely to report any threats to the authorities or end their own lives before they were captured and tortured.

It wouldn't actually matter if they did reveal the secret. It's not like anyone in this world could build their own radio anyway, and anyone who steals one wouldn't be able to use it without an electrical power source. I'd rather the captive prioritize their own survival, but even if they do talk, the imprisoners would probably "silence" them anyway…

The less people know about radios, the better. That will prevent unnecessary harm to allies and enemies alike. Especially friends…

"I demand you hand over one of those magic items!" Beatrice's voice snapped Mitsuha back to the present. "I could use it to talk to you even when I'm at home in Bozes County, right?"

I knew she'd say that! …But that's a wish I just can't grant.

"No!" asserted Mitsuha.

"Why?! Colette's using one, and you just said that Princess Sabine has one in her own room!"

True, Mitsuha disclosed that last part too. Hiding such details would only tighten the noose around her own neck if Beatrice were to find out.

Besides, I don't wanna lie to her. Which means…

Mitsuha began to explain, "The radios I set up in my county residence and the royal palace are for emergency situations. They're there in case I need to be notified of a crisis. Therefore, they need to be in the hands of people I trust. I have Sabine at the royal palace, and Colette and my butler Anton at my residence. That's why I gave them the radios.

"Bozes County isn't situated along the kingdom's borders. It's highly unlikely to be attacked by an enemy nation before they hit the capital, and it's right next to my county, so it's hard to imagine any crisis could occur there without Yamano County noticing. If anything happens, my residence is only a few hours away on a horse at full speed. Regardless, why would Bozes County need the help of an upstarting young viscountess like me? Yamano County is the size of a barony.

"The existence of radios is highly classified information. There's no need great enough for me to install one in Bozes County and risk knowledge of them leaking. I also can't allow anyone to establish a system that relies on radios without my

involvement. A national defense strategy that's dependent on equipment no one can build or repair would crumble more easily than a sandcastle!"

"…"

Beatrice puffed out her cheeks indignantly, but she didn't argue. Her noble upbringing gave her a maturity that most fourteen-year-olds lacked. She'd been taught that the security of her family, the happiness of her people, and the stability of the country took precedence over personal desires. There were of course a lot of nobles who didn't behave according to that principle, but Beatrice wasn't one of them; she was smart. And because she was smart, she understood Mitsuha's point and couldn't retort.

She was *not* mature enough, however, to accept that Colette and Sabine had something that she didn't. It was hard to blame her for getting a little mopey.

I'll have to think of a way to cheer her up later. And I should probably leave her alone for now… Mitsuha thought as Beatrice turned her back to her.

There were a few small mishaps along the way—such as an axle breaking on one of the wagons that was overloaded with cargo—but the caravan made it to the capital on schedule. They succeeded at shortening the journey by one day, but at the cost of traveling for longer hours each day and thus placing a greater burden on the horses and crew. Mitsuha and Beatrice decided to

ask for everyone's opinion on whether the caravan should stick to the new schedule or return to the old one. The guards were paid by the day, which meant they made less money *and* worked longer hours on this trip. It was obvious they would complain.

The caravan crew split up once they reached the city square, and the merchants went about their own business. They planned to reconvene when it was time to load up the wagons with merchandise they procured in the capital and head back to Bozes County.

A portion of the caravan's goods were going to be delivered to Petz. He had first dibs because he was practically a first-line vendor to Yamano County. Mitsuha wanted to accommodate all the early contributors who helped start up her territory.

What about the people who tried to cozy up to her after finding out she was the Lightning Archpriestess—the girl who captured warships and acquired a third of the authority over them? And the people who offered her business proposals only after her development plans kicked off and started looking promising? There was no way she would give the same treatment to them.

…That might be why the merchants of the caravan ignored me and focused all their efforts on buttering up Beatrice. I am pretty curt with merchants who come inching their way in, rubbing their hands together.

Mitsuha didn't expect any of them to come to her with good deals, so there was no point in hearing them out. The only

merchant she gave favorable deals to with any regularity was Petz. The favorable offers she'd give to other merchants were "favorable to Yamano County." Count Bozes, on the other hand, accommodated merchants from his territory to help them grow their businesses. *I suppose that's not much different than the preferential treatment I give Petz.*

If Mitsuha had been the only one accompanying the caravan, the merchants likely would've focused entirely on her. But because Beatrice was there, the attention went to her. Unfortunately for the merchants, their young boss spent most of her time on the road with Mitsuha inside a carriage, getting feedback from the guards and coachmen during lunch breaks, and sleeping with Mitsuha in a tent at night. They hardly got to talk to her at all.

Once the crew split up, Mitsuha's custom carriage headed for the Bozes capital residence with a few guards in tow. Beatrice would be staying there, obviously. The townhouse's servants were informed of the journey, and they were undoubtedly on high alert for her arrival. This was a special occasion, after all; Beatrice would be staying at the residence without her parents or siblings, placing the servants under her sole command. That had never happened before and would probably never happen again.

Kneel before the beautiful young noble! Serve her every whim! …Yeah, the servants are gonna look after her like their lives depend on it.

The carriage arrived at the Bozes's townhouse in no time, and at last after the long journey, the guards were…not free to go. To Mitsuha's surprise, they followed her inside.

Oh, the count probably designated them to serve Beatrice specifically. I guess that makes sense. The priority of the guard team hired by the merchants was to protect their employers and their cargo. There was no way Count Bozes and Lady Iris would've let them be the only protection Beatrice had on the road, even with me there. I'm sure the count also ordered these guys to protect her from the merchants and their guards. It was very unlikely anyone would harm her, but he can't take any chances when it comes to his daughter's life…

"Welcome back, Lady Beatrice!"

Whoa! Mitsuha flinched when she saw nearly all of the mansion's servants lined up to greet Beatrice. Rufus the butler stood at the front of the group. *What a grand welcome. I guess I shouldn't be surprised…*

Beatrice smiled and waved with a casual, "Thank you for all your help for the next few days." She spent a little while on the journey upset about the radio, but she eventually cheered up and didn't mention it again. She must've realized that it'd be a waste to spend her quality time with Mitsuha sulking. It was obvious she was still displeased on the inside, though.

I suppose a noble girl in her adolescence deserves credit for showing that level of restraint. Any other noble girl might've

thrown a tantrum, kicking and screaming and all. But that's Beatrice for you—she really is Count Bozes's and Lady Iris's daughter, and I can see why she was chosen to be Princess Sabine's study friend. Yup, yup, I'm proud of her too.

I raised her into a fine young lady! (I didn't.)

Now that Beatrice was in the servants' care, Mitsuha turned around to head to her own residence in the capital: Mitsuha's General Store.

Grab!

Huh…? Why are you latching on to my shoulder, Beatrice? And why are you gripping my other shoulder, Rufus? I'm a girl, you know, and a viscountess too. Can a butler from another house really detain me like this? This has to be a violation of something… Right?

Chapter 73:
In the Capital

Mitsuha was dragged into the Bozes capital residence, forced to take a bath with Beatrice, scrubbed down by the maids—who also gave her a change of clothes and did her makeup—pressured into joining for dinner, and finally, roped into staying the night.

I wanted to go to my store and jump to my home in Japan for a long relaxing bath… Would've been nice after ten days on the road… But oh well. The bath at the Bozes's was good enough. Being washed by the maids was really awkward, though…

It wasn't long after dinner when the inevitable happened.

"I waited at your store forever! Why didn't you co-o-o-ome?!"

Sabine showed. Mitsuha knew the princess would learn of her arrival in the capital from her "sources" (a questionable group called the Mitsuha Watch Squad), and that it was only a matter of time until she popped up at the Bozes capital residence. Sabine also heard that Beatrice was here without the rest of her family, so she fully intended on having a sleepover. She'd gone to the general store first, assuming that Mitsuha and Beatrice would stay there. Sabine absolutely would've chosen to stay at the place with all the DVDs, games, electric fan, heater, freezer, microwave…and expected Beatrice to choose the same.

I see, Sabine assumes I've told Beatrice about all my conveniences from Earth… She knows that Beatrice is working out of my county residence despite the official headquarters of Beatrice

Company being on Hollow Needle Island, so I can see why she'd think that.

Oh no—I need to get the story straight with Sabine before she spills anything…

As soon as Beatrice left the room, Mitsuha quickly caught the princess up with the details.

"What?! You should've told me sooner!" cried Sabine. "That was close… But wow. I had no idea you disclosed so little to Beatrice…"

She was right—Mitsuha hadn't told Beatrice about Earth. Beatrice only knew about her secret Traversal ability and a few items that were only slightly more developed than this world's. The most advanced gadget she'd seen was an electric fan; the wind-blowing mechanism was easy to figure out by looking at the wing-shaped blades. The only thing that was hard to comprehend was the power source that made the blades turn.

"But… I see…" Sabine muttered to herself.

Her expression was a mix of surprise and hesitation after learning that Mitsuha hadn't told Beatrice many of her secrets. The two girls had been friends since long before they'd met Mitsuha. They were introduced to Colette separately, and Sabine was probably hoping the three of them would start spending more time together.

But anything I tell Beatrice has a high chance of making its way to Count Bozes. I'm not saying Beatrice is going to gossip or betray me. My concern is that she might let something slip by

accident or try to cover for me and dig herself a deeper hole. She's better off knowing nothing than living with the stress of keeping my secrets. Sometimes ignorance is bliss.

Beatrice returned and the three of them enjoyed some girl talk. Shortly after, they moved to the bedroom and the pajama party began. They were in nightgowns rather than pajamas, but it was close enough. Despite Sabine having to bite her tongue multiple times to avoid mentioning DVDs and other things from Earth, they had fun.

This is the first time I've spent a night with these two. You wouldn't believe how excited they were… I could barely keep up…

The next morning, Mitsuha left the griping Beatrice behind as she headed out to her general store.

Hey, I've got business to take care of too, you know. They couldn't expect me to stay all day. Although they did manage to keep me captive until after lunch…

Sabine followed Mitsuha, of course. Beatrice fought hard to keep them from leaving her behind. Frankly, Mitsuha didn't want Sabine to come with her either; she needed to go to the New World to restock, and the princess's presence would make that a challenge. But she hadn't been there in over ten days, so Lephilia Trading and the partner stores across the continent were probably running low on inventory. Business at Lephilia Trading was stable enough to survive, but the new companies were at a

critical point in their expansion and couldn't afford any sales interruptions.

Mitsuha was keeping her base in Vanel—the home of the invading fleet—a secret from her king, so she hadn't told Sabine about it either. *She's probably figured some of it out, though…* There was no other explanation for Sabine to be secretly studying the Vanelian language, which Mitsuha had found out through Colette. It was almost certain that the princess knew that her two friends were constantly jumping somewhere without her. She was sharp enough to figure that much.

But there was a big difference between information you inferred and information you were told directly. If it were the latter, Sabine would have to choose between acting as the princess of her kingdom and as Mitsuha's friend. As a royal, it was her duty to prioritize the interests of her country and people, and inform the king about Mitsuha's secret. If she was just acting on conjectures, there was no need to tell anyone.

So yeah, it's likely Sabine's figured it all out. She's just avoiding the topic and pretending to know nothing out of consideration for me. Now it's on me to be mature and act like I haven't realized that. I need to figure out how to get rid of her, Mitsuha thought. She glanced at Sabine who was smiling widely. *That's gonna be easier said than done…*

"Mitsuha, are you going to Vanel after this? I'm going too!"

…Welp, so much for all that!

What a considerate girl Sabine is… But that impression turned out to be a product of Mitsuha's imagination.

I should've known…

Sabine was smart and attentive, but she was still a child. She wasn't gonna hold back when she wanted something badly… especially when there was already a precedent—Colette. Sabine knew to exercise self-restraint when she absolutely needed to, but there was no way she was going to back down when someone else was already being given what she wanted.

There was no persuading Sabine to relent once she learned that Mitsuha was regularly taking Colette to the New World. The one excuse Mitsuha had—"Well, Colette knows the local language. You don't."—had been quashed.

Damn it, looks like I have no choice…

With that, much to Mitsuha's reluctance, Sabine became her sidekick for her long list of errands that needed to be finished before the caravan's departure.

Not a problem, though.

Mitsuha's errand trip didn't include Colette. She'd left her behind at the county residence so she could practice looking after it during its master's absence. Taking both Colette and Sabine would've been difficult, given how familiar with the New World the former was. This might've actually been the perfect occasion for Sabine's New World debut.

Not that I had any intention of ever taking Sabine to the New World, but whatever… Too late now…

“Okay, ready?” Mitsuha asked after a short rest at her general store.

“Yep!”

Jump!

“So this is the New World… Wait a minute, I’ve been here before…”

Sabine didn’t know it, but she’d actually been to the New World once. Mitsuha gave her and Colette a tour of her latest ventures as proof that she’d been super busy. She only showed them the interior of the commodity shop before jumping to the next location, so Sabine didn’t realize at the time that they were in Vanel.

“Yep, this is the New World,” said Mitsuha. “That means you’ve been here with Colette before. We’re the only three people from our continent to ever set foot here.”

Colette’s reaction was obvious that it was her first time at the store too, which meant Sabine and Colette went to the New World for the first time together, just like with Japan. Mitsuha did not put her on the back burner.

Sabine would surely notice what that means.

As a result…the princess’s lips began to curl up into a smile.

That sure was easy. She’s mature and smart for her age, but it’s times like this that remind me she’s still a kid.

“All right, let’s go visit my clients,” Mitsuha said.

“Okay!”

“…And so, this is my Little Sister Number 2. Go ahead and introduce yourself,” Mitsuha nudged.

“Nice meeting of you!” Sabine said.

Hmm, she’s not as good at Vanelian as Colette. It’s not really a fair comparison, though; Sabine has to split her time between other studies and etiquette training while Colette studies as if her life with me depends on it. Sabine’s learning speed is astonishing, nonetheless. I mean, her only resources are a handmade dictionary and some prisoners in the capital. And the prisoners can only speak Vanelian, so I can’t imagine they’re great teachers.

From my perspective as someone who could barely speak any English before I got my automatic translation ability, Colette and Sabine are geniuses… It’s amazing how fast children can learn!

Mitsuha introduced Sabine to Lephilia and a few key employees at Lephilia Trading, collected the order sheets from them and the partner stores, and then jumped to the Wolf Fang base.

“Get this stuff for me, please. And I’ll take what you have now.” Mitsuha handed the stack of order sheets to the captain. She was running a busy schedule, so she was simply going to grab what they had in their storehouse, ask the Wolf Fang men to secure the rest of the orders, and take off.

“Geez, li’l lady… You’re in a rush,” the captain mumbled as she hurried off to the storehouse.

Mitsuha found what she needed and jumped to Lephilia Trading and each of the partner stores throughout the continent to make her deliveries.

Jump, jump, jump, jump…

"You're way too busy!" Sabine complained.

"I warned you, didn't I? I've got a lot on my plate! I have a couple more errands to run in the New World, some stuff left to do for my county, a bunch of things in Japan, and I need to finish them all before the caravan's departure date. That's only a few days away."

"…Sorry."

Sabine was finally grasping just how hard Mitsuha's week was going to be. She probably realized that she was slowing Mitsuha down by insisting that she accompany her. It had to be clear now that she and Colette got to spend much more time with Mitsuha than Beatrice, who didn't know about Japan or the New World or that Mitsuha could use her Traversal ability without harm to herself.

Sabine also realized that she was intruding on Beatrice's precious time with Mitsuha, and was starting to feel guilty over that too.

Well, Beatrice will have me to herself on the return trip. Sabine really doesn't need to feel bad.

Telling Sabine that probably wouldn't relieve her of her guilt, though, so Mitsuha decided to console her with a few gentle pats on the head.

That should be enough to convey my feelings. Sabine and I don't need words to understand each other.

Soon after that, Mitsuha dropped Sabine off at the royal palace and took care of the rest of her errands. There was an event in two days that she needed to prepare for.

"This is everything you ordered, right?"

Mitsuha was at a Society meeting. Traveling with the caravan would tie up her schedule for almost thirty days, so she had Society schedule this meeting to fall on a day when she was still in the capital; not meeting for a month because of her absence would've caused problems. *By problems, I mean getting complaints from the girls…*

Mitsuha gave the Society members the products they requested and collected their money. They always paid in everyone's favorite method of payment: cold hard cash. Girls of nobility likely didn't get to go shopping by themselves, so this was a good experience for them. They seemed to enjoy the simple act of spending their own money and buying their own things.

Learning how to shop for themselves will be an essential survival skill if any of them get dragged into one of those classic villainess plots—like having an engagement revoked and then getting banished from high society… Actually, if that ever happens, I'll help them get their revenge and stomp out the heroine. I'd do anything for my valuable cog—I mean, friends!

One of the girls spoke up. "Mitsuha, I have a problem…"

Huh? A dear club member in need of my help?

“The thing is… I’ve been getting a lot of marriage proposals because of the aid we provided for Baron Wennard’s territory and the portraits you gave me. But I don’t want to get married yet! My life has become so more much fun since we all became friends…”

Ah…

“I’ve been getting marriage proposals too, actually…”

“Me too…”

“Please do something, Lady Mitsuha!”

Don’t look at me…

Mitsuha was in no position to interfere with marriage talks between noble families of another country. Even if she could, she wouldn’t.

I have no desire to get involved in people’s lives and the affairs of the aristocracy. That would be asking for death flabs—er, I mean, death flags. But then again, as a Japanese person, seeing cute teenage girls being forced into political marriages isn’t something I could ignore…

Oh! I’ve got it!

“How about this? Tell your parents and siblings that if you get married, you’ll become a member of your husband’s family. That means that the alcohol, makeup, and other Yamano County goods you’re allowed to purchase for your family will all go to your new family. Would that work?” Mitsuha asked.

“That’s perfect!” the girls exclaimed.

Their families will surely change their minds once they hear that they'll lose their first dibs privilege at buying Yamano County goods and realize all the alcohol and makeup will become inaccessible to them.

Then in a few years, the girls will come crying to me again when they want to get married but their families won't let them.

Yeah, yeah… I know what I've done.

It was time for the caravan to head back home. Mitsuha would once again be stuck on the road for close to ten days, so she took care of everything she needed to before then. If any emergencies occurred at her county residence, Anton or Colette would call her. Sabine was her contact in the capital. The only other location she could be alerted from was Princess Kak-Kak-Kak's place.

The caravan was gathered in the city square in front of the royal palace. The crew members and wagons were all the same; the only difference was the cargo.

Rufus and several other servants from the Bozes capital residence had come to see Beatrice off. That made sense—they wouldn't let Beatrice go to the city square alone, even if the count's guards were with her.

Oh, should I have met her at the residence? Whoops…

Something about Beatrice seemed different. Not in a bad way. There was a sort of confidence, a commanding air about her as she spoke to her servants, and she wore it naturally. She was your average naïve noble girl when they left Yamano County. Did she

grow that much in the last couple weeks from commanding the caravan on the way here and being in charge at the townhouse? Mitsuha was mystified.

Beatrice believed Mitsuha was younger than her, so even though the latter held peerage of her own and was known as the kingdom's savior, she elected not to rely on the viscountess's help and took her position as the caravan's commander very seriously. This was also her first time alone at the capital residence; her parents or brothers were always with her in the past, so she'd probably never been in a situation where she had to head the residence staff herself. This time, she traveled alone and stayed at the townhouse without a single member of her family present.

Did something happen at the residence? Or maybe nothing at all? But she looks positively radiant. She's clearly grown so much in a short span of time… I guess this proves the wisdom of the old Japanese saying, "If you love your child, you should send them on a journey." People really knew what they were talking about in the old days…

Oh, wait. That's not right. People back then were probably saying an equal number of dumb things as smart things, but only the latter got passed down and remembered. It's not like everyone from back then was wise.

Shortly afterward, Beatrice gave out brief commands to the crew and the caravan departed.

What happened to you, Beatrice?! I didn't see you dictate like that on the way here.

“Mitsuha, the average wealth and quality of life of your county’s citizens have increased significantly since you took over,” Beatrice began. “I think it’s time to start introducing luxury foods and products into the market to encourage spending, and raise their standard of comfort. You need to make your people use the money they’ve earned… Which brings me to my next topic: I found some empty space in one of the wagons and got the merchant to carry some goods that I acquired. I’d like to sell them in Yamano County…”

Huh… So she convinced a merchant to carry her personal cargo for free…? Who is this girl?! I want the old Beatrice back!!!

Mitsuha needed a moment to collect herself.

“Wh-What happened to you…?” she finally managed to utter.

“Hm? Oh, I was having a few discussions with my servants,” Beatrice said as she gazed longingly in the distance.

What kind of discussions would a lord’s daughter have with her servants? Hmm…

Sure, Beatrice had always been bright. She was chosen to be Sabine’s study friend for a reason. But she was also fourteen to Sabine’s eleven; the royal court intentionally selected a wiser, older girl who’d set a good example for the princess. A three-year age difference during adolescence is huge. Eleven-year-old Sabine had some…maturing to do, to put it kindly. It wasn’t unnatural for Beatrice to be so put-together by comparison.

No, hold the phone! What about me when I was fourteen? I was in my second or third year in middle school… I was still a total

kid! Is Beatrice mature because of her position as a noble? Or because you have to grow up fast to make it in this cruel, cruel world?

…Girls from this world are amazing!

Now that Mitsuha thought about it, Micchan 2.0 was also mature for her age. That went for the other members of Society too; they acted their age when they were chatting about boys and random casual topics, but they could also handle serious topics about their territories and citizens. Considering that, there was nothing weird about Beatrice being just a little more polished than them.

Maybe I've just been underestimating her because she's a child and so much younger than me. And now she's flourished during this trip.

Mitsuha had always treated Colette and Sabine as something akin to friends, family, and accomplices (or partners in crime), which was why she shared all her secrets with them. But Beatrice was the daughter of Count Bozes—the man who had done so much to help her. Mitsuha thought of her dearly and was doing her part to protect her, but she saw her as a member of the Bozes family, not her own. Sabine, however, probably wanted her to be a part of "the gang." She even assumed that Mitsuha told Beatrice all her secrets…

As a royal, Sabine didn't go to school like an ordinary child. Beatrice might've been her only real friend. She likely had other study-friends as well, but there wasn't an abundance of girls

within three years of Sabine's age whose family had a rank of count or above, belonged to the same faction, was on friendly terms with the royal family, held similar values, and had no connections to any shady business. Beatrice was also smart and talented, and her personality was a good match for Sabine's. She checked every box.

You can't just find a girl like that anywhere.

The two may have been set up by their parents, but that had no impact on their friendship. If Sabine didn't like Beatrice, they never would've spent more time than the bare minimum together.

Beatrice was probably in the same position. As a noble, she couldn't go to school either. There were no other noble girls in Bozes County, and even when she was in the capital, there wasn't much opportunity for a girl who hadn't yet debuted in high society to make friends. Birthday parties were organized for finding a marriage partner, not for making a friend of the same gender. Children of the same gender were rivals and enemies.

High society is brutal…

The situation was virtually the same for noble children in the New World, which was why the girls in Society were having so much fun together. They'd never had friends who they could talk about anything with and put aside their ranks and factions. The group being limited to nobles meant they didn't have to worry about commoners joining either. It was a safe space for them.

In a world of factional strife, county border disputes, business transactions, and political marriages, other noble families were enemies. The girls of those families existed to be used as tools. Despite that, they found each other and became genuine friends. Society probably felt like paradise on earth to them.

Those girls will never betray each other, and I'll never betray them. As long as they remain useful to me, that is.

"Mitsuha! Listen to me, Mitsuha!" Beatrice shouted.

"Huh? Oh, sorry. I was thinking…"

"'Daydream time,' right? I heard all about it! Never mind that. What did you talk about with Sabine?"

…Oh, I see. She's jealous. Sabine's been Beatrice's friend for much longer than I have. Which means I'm the girl who stole Sabine away.

Now if I were a teenage girl, how would I feel watching one of my few friends leave me out and spend time with someone we haven't known for long?

…Yeah, I'm surprised she hasn't blown up at me. It's amazing that she's not letting her anger show on her face. Beatrice sure is mature—I mean, I'm so sorry!

Chapter 74:
The Return Trip

The caravan reached Yamano County. The trip back was uneventful; they didn't make any stops to conduct business, and they took the main path where bandits and monsters were rarely seen. Besides, no one was dumb enough to attack carriages flying the Bozes County flag and Yamano County flag, commonly known as the Lightning Archpriestess's flag.

You occasionally see Goomb—I mean goblins on the road, but it's nothing the guards couldn't handle. That means tame, uneventful trips are the norm. No one would use the main road if carriages were regularly looted. The risk of loss would be too great.

Mitsuha climbed out of her carriage and waited for Beatrice's personal cargo to be unloaded. The cleared space was going to be filled with goods that the merchants would buy at Yamano County, which was mostly seafood and things from Earth. Marine life off the shores of Bozes County and Yamano County were essentially the same because they bordered each other, but Yamano County's processed seafood was better. Their fishermen also had larger hauls because they used Japanese fishing tools and imitations based on them.

There were very few villages that could top Yamano County's seafood. The difference in quality was evident when it came to products that required experience and knowledge—combined with existing methods in Japan—to make. Smoked fish, sun-dried

fish, and *ichiya-boshi* were some of them. There were many more ways to make dried fish than just leaving it out in the sun until it was completely shriveled. …*Which, by the way, is the only type of dried fish that lasts in this world since we don't have refrigerators here.*

Yamano County was also developing savory snacks made from seaweed and shellfish that paired well with alcohol. Some people in the Bozes County fishing villages had already started imitating Yamano County goods, but the quality wasn't quite the same. *They'll probably catch up before long, though…*

If I learned one thing on this trip, it's that Bozes County merchants sure know what they're doing. If they see an opportunity to make money, they squeeze out every copper coin they can. There's no way that merchant actually had space in his wagon for Beatrice's goods. Someone was lying…

Oh—not Beatrice. It was the merchant who must've been lying. No accomplished merchant would allow any nook or cranny unfilled on the trip back. They're much more likely to pack the wagon to its maximum weight capacity. I'll bet he lied when he said he had space and removed some of his own goods to fit Beatrice's… while fighting back tears.

Well, I'm sure Count Bozes will realize what happened when Beatrice gives him a detailed account of the trip. He'll probably have to make it up to the merchant by giving him a spot on the next caravan or by buying his products for a generous price…

Beatrice left her cargo—to be sold in Yamano County—behind but remained with the caravan as it headed for Bozes County. She needed to report to her father. It wouldn't be long before she came back to Mitsuha's residence, anyway. Then again, her parents would complain if she took off too soon. She'd have to stay home for at least two weeks to appease them.

What should I do, Mitsuha thought anxiously. She contemplated Sabine's desires, Colette's desires, and finally, Beatrice's desires. She had an important decision to make: should she adopt Beatrice into "the gang" by telling her everything?

There would be advantages. First off, it'd make Sabine and Colette happy. The same went for Beatrice… And Mitsuha too, of course. Mitsuha would also gain another valuable pawn. Beatrice was already an aide in the trading business, but she could be trusted to be so much more—an envoy, a vanguard, a secret weapon against Count Bozes and Lady Iris… Having Beatrice on her team would definitely be an advantage.

On the other hand, there were drawbacks. Beatrice would be spending more time in Yamano County than with her family. Mitsuha would feel guilty about that. She was the Bozeses' only daughter, after all. Mitsuha already had to listen to the parents' complaints, woes, snide remarks about their daughter's absence. To think that all of that would escalate… Also, she couldn't disregard the possibility of Beatrice revealing information in hopes of benefits for her family.

We might be good friends, but I don't think I alone am enough to tip the scales against her parents, brothers, citizens, and the royal family… I'm not talking about my actual weight!

At the end of the day, Beatrice is a noblewoman. She understands her duties. That's true of Sabine too, but we became close friends before I had a chance to think about pros and cons…

Sabine's a little different from an ordinary elite, anyway. She'd probably abandon her country for me without a second thought. Don't take that the wrong way—she wouldn't betray the kingdom. She'd just insist on following me anywhere even if it meant leaving her home forever.

Sabine's love for me is overwhelming!

Mitsuha ordered for Beatrice's goods to be transported to her storehouse, and then headed for her residence.

The goods were bought by Beatrice with all the allowance money she'd been saving up. That meant she didn't buy them as a representative of the Bozes family, but for her own personal investment. This was her debut as a true businesswoman. All earnings would go to Beatrice alone, not the family.

It was clever of her to sell her goods in Yamano County instead of Bozes County where the market was saturated. She was clearly planning on penetrating Mitsuha's sales routes.

She's got a good eye… Which should be no surprise, given that I raised her! She's grown so much. A little too much, if you ask me… Especially in the chest area. Damn it all!

The investment money came from the allowances she'd been saving up. It may be a child's allowance, but she was a child of nobility. Her entire savings was quite significant from a commoner's perspective. She'd even secretly sold a few of her accessories. It was much more money than what a Japanese office worker would invest when starting out in stocks or futures trading.

Don't rely on leverage to grow your business, Beatrice…

Mitsuha walked up to the entrance of her county residence but no one emerged from the door to greet her. Her servants should've heard her horse and carriage approaching. Colette would've already sprinted outside and flung herself at her master by now, with the servants following close behind.

That could only mean one thing.

"Welcome back!" She heard the chorus of her servants.

Yup, they were waiting in the entrance hall, thought Mitsuha as she stepped inside. Colette stood in the center of the row of staff. She looked on sternly with her back straight like a soldier. She stepped forward and bowed.

"Everything at the Yamano County residence is in order. No personnel or equipment is out of service!" she announced.

"Thank you for all your hard work!" responded Mitsuha.

"You have control!"

"I have control!"

"Welcome back, Mitsuha!"

The little girl grinned widely and threw herself at Mitsuha as soon as they finished their little ritual.

Her excitement was unsurprising; it had been a long trip. Mitsuha couldn't remember the last time she went almost a month without seeing Colette. The poor girl probably wanted to run outside and hug her friend as soon as she arrived, but she held back until she officially passed command of the residence.

I'm so proud of you, Colette!

Oh, "You have control" and "I have control" are phrases pilots and copilots use when transferring control of a plane. Our routine is based on it.

…Why did I implement that, you ask? Because it's cool, duh! Look how impressed all the servants look. It's small displays like this that gain their respect. I also want to make it clear to them that Colette is my chief vassal. She's next in line at the Yamano residence!

Miriam, Willem, and Anton might've appeared more qualified, but they were only advisors and board members. Colette—the dearest friend who would never betray Mitsuha—was second in command and assumed control of the viscountess's home when she was gone. Anton and the others couldn't make the best decisions without knowing about Earth, Wolf Fang, and the emergency weapons and ammunition hidden in the residence. In the event of a raid, Colette would be able to judge whether they should surrender to the enemy or resist until their master returned.



That was why even if Mitsuha were to entrust tactical decisions to Willem and policy decisions to Miriam, it was Colette who would be making strategic decisions and issuing the ruling that decided the fate of Yamano County during her absence. The girl even had a voice on whether or not the weapons arsenal should be opened.

Maybe I should adopt Colette. That way, she'll inherit the Yamano residence if anything happens to me. Hmm, that might be a good idea…

Colette Yamano, from cute little village girl to chief vassal to viscountess.

Maybe she'll grow up to be a bewitching beauty.

Chapter 75:
The Third Princess

“The crown prince from a bordering nation is visiting. I will not tolerate any of your recent selfish behavior in his presence!” the king of Vanel demanded. He was unlike his usual self that day.

“Fine…” the queen and the first and second princesses grumbled. The third princess quietly nodded.

“Come on, cheer up!” continued the king. “This isn’t a large-scale party where everyone and their families are invited. It’s just a small banquet. You’ll be the only women there. You shouldn’t have anything to worry about! And do you really think the crown prince is coming all this way just for a simple exchange of diplomatic papers? What kind of message would it send if none of you were present at this banquet? He’ll take it as an insult, which would worsen our relationship with his country! Do you think you can handle the consequences? Are *you* going to address our people and publicly apologize for harming the national interest because of your own selfish insecurities?”

“Urh…” The queen and the two eldest princesses had no retort.

The queen and princesses had been angry with the king. The makeup, jewelry, and food from Yamano County were the talk of noble society, and the royal family had been blacklisted from buying them. The blame for that fell on the king. The makeup was the biggest problem; it’d given certain noblewomen and girls

an unfair advantage over those without it, and the queen and princesses had made it clear that they wouldn't appear in public again until the king got it for them.

Unfortunately, this banquet was not something they could skip. The crown prince's true purpose for visiting Vanel was to meet the princesses.

It wasn't like they had no chance of obtaining Yamano County makeup, though. It might've been impossible for a noble family, but they were royalty; they should be able to acquire a few after throwing their weight around and pulling some strings.

The particular makeup set given to members of Society, however, was another story. No girl in the club would be willing to risk losing her position. Society was a paradise that promised all of its members a bright future. What would getting expelled from that paradise—that exclusive group of young, beautiful saints—do for one's reputation?

It would mean death in high society. A total death without any hope of coming back. A fate equivalent to falling further than the lowest circle of hell.

Society was an organization full of secrets, but there was one known fact: no one in the circle would betray each other. The solidarity and loyalty among the members were strong—not even Mitsuha knew just how tremendous it was…

"Let's welcome Prince Wallace and his party with a toast! Cheers!"

“Cheers!”

The king and his advisors decided to keep the banquet intimate by limiting their participants to the immediate royal family, the chancellor, and the top ministers of the government. The crown prince’s retinue was officially visiting to exchange some diplomatic papers, but everyone knew their true purpose was for the prince to meet the three princesses.

The prince was the future king of his land. He was a good-looking young man known for his sharpness and good character, making him a coveted prize for royal girls throughout the continent. His kingdom also bordered Vanel, meaning the Vanelian princesses wouldn’t be too far from home if one of them were to be matched with him. The king, queen, and their ministers had a vested interest in the meeting going well because a marriage would strengthen relations between their countries, but even without that factor, the three princesses were very eager.

Suddenly, a chill swept through the room.

The entire banquet’s mood shifted. The sense of unrest came primarily from the first and second princesses.

“N… N-N-Neleah? Wh-Wh-What is the meaning of this…” stuttered the first princess.

“H-H-How could y-y-you? Th-Th-That’s so dirty…” the second princess trembled.

The first princess, second princess, and queen were all visibly shaking as they stared at the youngest princess. They

couldn’t believe what she’d done.

The third princess had joined Society without the knowledge of the royal family or the palace staff using her title as Viscountess Neleah de Wechter rather than as the third princess of Vanel. She then obtained the best makeup Society had to offer and had some of her new companions to help her look as beautiful as possible. She also borrowed some jewelry from Mitsuha (who charged a rental fee, of course).

Princess Neleah had invited three Society girls over to the royal palace to help with the makeover. Currently, the girls were in the princess’s private chamber. “Feel free to look around and touch whatever you want,” the princess had said on her way out, and they were doing just that with great interest while the princess was at the banquet.

With a full makeover, Princess Neleah looked nearly as beautiful as Kaleah de Shilebart when she got help from Society to win over a count’s eldest son. The two other princesses may as well have been mobs. On top of that, she was the youngest.

Neleah ignored her twitching sisters with a composed smile on her face. The sisters seethed internally, knowing they couldn’t let their anger show and embarrass the royal family.

It was standard practice for princesses to get married in order from oldest to youngest. Both of the older sisters were still single, so they had the right of way over Neleah—that was if age were the only factor. But the battle wasn’t over yet. It was too early for them to panic.

Servers began to stream into the dining hall, carrying dishes and setting them before the banquet attendees. More than a few of them were young women; it seemed as if an effort was made to choose attractive staff.

“Ah!”

There was a yelp, followed by the gentle clinking of tableware. One of the servers had bumped into the table, causing a slice of meat to slide off the plate, down the tablecloth, and onto Princess Neleah’s dress…leaving behind a trail of sauce stains.

“Whah?!” voices croaked. This was an unforgivable mistake for a server to make. A disgraceful accident.

Everyone froze, and the young serving maid went pale. She had just dropped food on a princess, of all people, at a banquet held to welcome a foreign royal. She was certain to be punished for this.

No one on the Vanelian side or the crown prince’s side moved or uttered a word. They weren’t angry at the maid; instead, they pitied her for the cruel fate that surely awaited her as a result of this accident.

“Oh dear,” Princess Neleah spoke up, “did your hand slip because you were nervous? Don’t be too hard on yourself. There is nothing to get upset about,” She casually picked up the slice of meat that fell on her lap and plopped it back onto her plate.

“Huh…” Gasps of disbelief stirred the room.

Princess Neleah looked around the room and smiled again. “This is truly of no concern. The laundry maids take good care of

the tablecloths… And there is no dress or tablecloth worth losing a servant over."

The banquet guests were still frozen solid, but the crown prince and his people were beginning to show relief on their faces. No one wanted to see a young woman's life ruined because of one little mistake. If the princess herself insisted that this incident was nothing to be alarmed over, then nothing would come of it.

"Oh, but…" Princess Neleah turned to the maid, "I can imagine the guilt you must be feeling. It might be difficult to work with your boss and coworkers from now on—oh, I know. You can be my lady-in-waiting. I'll take care of the arrangements later."

"Whaaaaat?!" everyone cried out again. This time, both the Vanelians *and* the crown prince's people were staring bug-eyed.

A certain someone was also taking notice.

She's so kind and perceptive. I was told that she's only twelve, but to think she's already so composed and considerate of her people at that age. She couldn't have handled that situation better. And she's so beautiful…

That someone was none other than the crown prince. Unsurprisingly, he couldn't take his eyes off her.

Smirk, thought Princess Neleah.

Smirk, thought the maid.

The princess had, of course, set this entire incident up. The serving maid agreed to the scheme on the promise that she wouldn't be punished for the dangerous scenario she was putting

herself in. The gamble paid off, though. She landed a position she never thought she would achieve in her wildest dreams: a lady-in-waiting for a princess.

Simultaneously, Princess Neleah gained a right-hand woman who wouldn't think twice about lying and getting her hands dirty for her own benefit. You couldn't survive in a royal family as a modest pushover.

If Mitsuha was here, she probably would've said this: "What a terrifying girl… That Neleah."

After the banquet, the king praised, "So you *can* speak in full sentences, Neleah…" She was known for saying as little as possible to get her point across.

"I do with people who are worth my time." With that Princess Neleah turned around and left.

"Are you saying your father isn't worth your time…?" The king fell to his knees as he watched his daughter walk away.

Don't take it personally, Your Majesty. Most girls her age are like that, thought everyone in the room.

Princess Neleah returned to her room where the three Society girls awaited. She reported that the operation was successful and that food and drinks would be brought to them. She then declared the start of a pajama party. This was in addition to the ample reward she'd promised in thanks to their help. The reward was to be in the form of "acts of service that a royal could provide" rather than money.

Earlier that day, Neleah had announced to her family that she was having friends over for a sleepover. Her mother and sisters likely figured out by now that the friends were involved in her scheme given the fact that the sleepover was held today of all days. They could hardly interrogate her playmates, however. It was just a few hours ago that the king, the queen, and the older princesses were thrilled to learn that Neleah had such close friends. Grilling the guests with questions would've caused major strife with their parents who were nobles.

Neleah had witnessed how genuinely happy her siblings were for her. Yet she betrayed them without batting an eyelid. Savage, she truly was.

She didn't tell the three Society members about her scheme with the serving maid. As far as they knew, the makeup was the only secret weapon she used in her attempt to woo the crown prince. Mitsuha wasn't involved in the operation at all; in fact, she didn't even know about it. She did allow the princess to borrow her jewelry from Earth—for significantly more money than what she paid—but she didn't know what they were going to be used for.

Neleah didn't tell Mitsuha because she was merely inviting some friends over to practice makeup, which might as well have had nothing to do with Society. There was no need to seek permission, nothing to report. Thus, from the princess's perspective, she wasn't betraying Mitsuha or hiding anything from her.

As a result, the girls' compensation would come from Princess Neleah herself rather than Society. They were perfectly okay with that; their parents would also reward them greatly once they heard that the third princess owed their child a favor. The girls weren't concerned about the rage of the two older princesses either; they'd mostly be upset at their sister.

"Are you sure you'll be okay?" one of the girls asked with concern. "Won't your mother and your sisters storm into your room in search of the makeup as soon as we leave?"

They were talking over the food and drinks that had been set.

"Don't worry. I'm going to leave the palace with you three tomorrow and hide for a little while. Their heads will cool in the meantime. I'm sure they'll eventually forget about me and start trying to acquire makeup through different channels."

"B-But getting a hold of our makeup will be difficult, even for the queen. If you return when she realizes that, she'll hound you down again. It could turn into a bloodbath," another girl said.

It was natural that the Society members were so worried. They would never forget the chaos that fell upon their households the day after Society's Tea Party Number Zero. They all spent the next day practicing applying the makeup with their maids, only for their mothers and sisters to lose their minds when they emerged for dinner. They probed the girls, stole the makeup from their rooms, and forced them to teach them how to use it. Tensions ran so high that even their fathers and grandparents had to get involved.

Personal experience told the girls that the queen and older princesses wouldn't give up that easily.

"…It's okay. I'm sure they'll calm down by the time I come home in a few years," Princess Neleah said.

"A few *years*? Is that what 'a little while' means to royalty?!"

"…And so, here I am. You'll be looking after me for a little while." Princess Neleah dropped the bomb upon showing at the front door of Mitsuha's commodity shop.

"Why the hell would I look after you?!" Mitsuha snapped. She tried to send Neleah away, but the princess wouldn't take no for an answer. She eventually relented and led the girl up to the second floor.

"Oh, are you showing me to my…room…?" The princess couldn't believe her eyes. The space on the second floor was totally devoid of furniture. It was evident that no one lived here.

I'm only renting this space to jump safely to the capital and to make it look like this is my house so no one will question why I'm not staying at any inn. I'm only running the store out of this building for camouflage. I've never actually spent a night here—and I'm not gonna let myself fall asleep in enemy territory. I've never used the toilet or bathroom (which has a small tub I can fill with hot water) on the first floor either… I just jump back to Japan every time I need to.

"You don't…live here?" Princess Neleah asked, stunned.

“Nope. I just run the shop downstairs and commute from my actual place of residence,” answered Mitsuha. “And where I live is a secret. I’m not the biggest fan of people showing up uninvited or sneaking into my house to rob or kidnap me.” *Understatement of the year right there.* “This should go without saying, but that includes the royal family, anyone from the royal palace, and nobles.”

In other words, Neleah’s status as a princess would gain her nothing here.

“…That’s a problem,” the princess murmured.

“Not my problem, though…” Mitsuha had no intention or obligation to get involved in this matter.

…Well, that’s true in regard to “Princess Neleah,” but I can’t act so coldly toward “Viscountess Neleah de Wechter,” a fellow member of Society… Damn it.

“…And so, I brought her with me. You’ll be looking after her for a little while,” Mitsuha declared.

“Why the hell would I look after *her*?!” Micchan exploded.

Mitsuha was at the Mitchell estate with Princess Neleah.

Hmm, this conversation sounds familiar…

“Okay, fair, but I don’t know where else to take her…”

“You… You *idiot*!” screamed Micchan. “Don’t you have any common sense?! This is why you have so few friends!”

“D’oooh!” Mitsuha crumbled in shock.

“D’oooh!” Princess Neleah parroted.

“Micheline, don’t insult people like that!” It was Marquis Mitchell who called out from the next room. “Regardless of having common sense or not, she’s still your friend. And it’s not ladylike to use that kind of language. Stop dillydallying out there and invite your guest into the reception room!”

He’d only heard Micchan’s side of the conversation from his study, so he didn’t realize who she was screeching at. It wasn’t until he stepped into the foyer to chide his daughter and invite the guest inside that he saw who she’d just called an idiot with no common sense.

“Di-Di-Di…” Marquis Mitchell was sputtering.

Is he trying to cast the Diacute spell?

“Did you just yell at Princess Neleah?!”

Oh, he fainted…

“…Agh! O-Oh, that was a dream… Hahaha, of course it was… Micheline would never yell at a princess and call her an idiot…”

Marquis Mitchell woke up in his bed and smiled wryly.

“Sorry bud, but that wasn’t a dream.”

“Huh?”

The marquis looked toward the voice and saw…

“…Princess Neleah *and* Viscountess Yamano?”

His jaw dropped, and at the next beat…

“GAAAAAAAH! I’M RUINED!”

“Oh, he fainted again.”

“How could you be such a fool?!” thundered the marquis.

“I-I’m sorry.” Micchan hung her head.

It was unacceptable for a marquis’s daughter to insult a princess, no matter the reason.

Well, Micchan was insulting me*, but she was facing both of us, and Princess Neleah is the reason we’re here, so it wouldn’t be entirely wrong to say she was yelling at the princess… This could mean disaster for the Mitchell family.*

The three of us know that Micchan was speaking to Neleah not as the third princess, but as Viscountess Neleah de Wechter—the newest member of Society. It’s within her right as the president of Society to scold a newcomer. That’s why she didn’t hesitate to speak like that in front of the princess, other than the fact she was directing her anger at me. Not even a high-ranking noble girl like Micchan could speak so boldly to a princess otherwise.

The marquis knows none of this, of course…

Neleah stepped in. “Don’t be mad. It’s my fault President Micheline is upset. I should’ve explained first.”

“Uh, err…”

He cooled down instantly after hearing that. What choice did he have? Continuing to reprimand Micchan would be the same as criticizing the princess, which would obviously be problematic. Unlike Micchan, the marquis wasn’t a member of Society; to him, she was a royal, not a fellow noble.

Anyway, Neleah saved Micchan from being yelled at by her father. Though considering she was the reason Micchan got in

trouble in the first place, Micchan didn't feel a smidgen of gratitude toward her.

Neleah began to explain how she ended up in her situation…

"You're a monster!" Mitsuha and Micchan raged.

Neleah grew quiet.

She had pulled a truly evil stunt on her (likely) innocent sisters. She also came up with a dangerous scheme that could've possibly ruined a maid's life. Mitsuha and Micchan were so flabbergasted by her callousness that they couldn't help but raise their voices. The marquis wisely chose to stay silent, while trying to keep a straight face.

I can't believe this girl… Mitsuha thought. *Wait a minute…*

"Neleah, can I ask a question? There's just one thing bothering me."

"Sure. Shoot."

She really does like to say as few words as possible… I guess she could've stopped at "sure" without adding the "shoot" if she were to say even less. Maybe she did that out of respect for me… Hold on, one extra word is all I'm worth?!

…Whatever. I'll ask my question.

"About the serving maid—the accomplice of yours… You didn't flee the royal palace without telling her, did you? You informed her of your plan so she won't be left behind in an awkward position, right? She's not in the dark in the pits of

despair, believing that you abandoned her, is she? I really hope you weren't planning to go months without contacting her."

"Uh…"

Seriously?! You left her in limbo?! You have to finish the job, Neleah!

"Go back, now!" snapped Mitsuha.

"Okay…" It looked like she had a heart and a conscience after all. That was a relief.

Mitsuha glanced at Micchan and the marquis, who'd just averted a crisis. They were still frozen solid from the near-heart attack.

Come back to me, guys!

"Phew, I wasn't sure how we were going to get out of that one," Mitsuha said with a loud sigh.

Micchan and the marquis followed suit with sighs of their own. Marquis Mitchell's relief was palpable; Princess Neleah never would've run away from the royal palace if not for his daughter's club. On top of that, the princess sought refuge at the Mitchell mansion where he had two sons. "The marquis must be scheming something," the other nobles would've gossiped behind his back. Worst case, this could've led to the downfall of his family.

Even marquises had lines they couldn't cross, as well as enemies who wouldn't have hesitated to exploit a scandal like this to take one down.

“Augh, I thought I was going to die,” the marquis said. That sounded overly dramatic, but he had plenty of reason to think that. The third princess’s actions really could’ve led to his death in high society.

Micchan looked at her friend. “You’re going to fix this, right? Mitsuha?”

“O-Of course!”

If she didn’t, the three princesses—who were allegedly very close—were going to fight and irreparably damage their relationship. That could lead to serious trouble for the royal family. *I know only one way to prevent that…*

“The first and second princesses will be permitted to buy my makeup…” Mitsuha offered reluctantly.

“The queen too! Blood will be shed if you don’t!” asserted Micchan.

“Y-Yes, ma’am…”

Micchan was right. Mitsuha had been plotting revenge against the king, but she had no qualms with the queen and princesses. She didn’t care for the royal family, but she didn’t want to see their relationship crumble because of her.

The marquis’s eyes widened. “Y-You don’t think the third princess did all this as a performance to acquire makeup for her mother and sisters, do you? Wow, what a thoughtful sister and daughter she is! A brilliant schemer, too!”

“I doubt that!” Mitsuha and Micchan harmonized.

Definitely not. If there's one thing I'm sure about, it's that Neleah is a natural airhead. She seems self-absorbed based on her actions alone, but that's simply a result of her lack of thinking ahead. She wasn't being malicious; she just chose the best method she could think of to accomplish her goals without considering how it'll affect those around her. And because she's so crafty, the damage is enormous.

She's like a plague…

"Where in the world is the blueprint draft of our next capital ship?!" demanded the director of a shipbuilding company.

"The lead architect is out visiting the naval port, sir…" his subordinate answered.

"Again? We need to do something about this… I mean, I know how they feel, but…"

The director couldn't take his eyes off his employees for a minute; as soon as he turned his back, the shipbuilders would take extended breaks to visit the naval port. "*This* time, for sure, I'll meet the ship's spirit and speak to her…" they'd mumble as they set out.

I get it, I really do! the director thought. *The entire reason I joined the navy and went into shipbuilding is because I love ships. If I learned that a ship I had a hand in building possessed a spirit, and that it took the form of a cute young girl, I'd race to the port too. In fact, I've already taken two breaks to do just that.*

Unfortunately, the ship's spirit didn't show herself to me either time…

In any event, I was able to elbow my way into the fleet headquarters and convince them to extend the life of the obsolete ships that were built by my company's owner two generations ago. Like hell I'm gonna let them use our babies for target practice!

"Speaking of which," the subordinate said. "I'm planning on going to the naval port myself next week. Could you please sign and approve my vacation request?"

"No." *Not happening!*

"But we have the right to take bre—"

"I've already submitted my own paperwork to take time off next week. We can't both be out of the office for a long period of time."

"Wh…" The subordinate looked crestfallen.

The early bird gets the worm, man. Don't hold it against me.

"Mitsuha, I've been hearing rumors of strange behavior among the navy men," Lephilia brought up.

"What do you mean?" Mitsuha asked.

"Companies associated with naval shipbuilding—lumbermen, craftsmen, and others all suddenly seem to be in a state of panic. Something's happened that caused a rapid downturn in their business. The navy personnel, too, started acting jittery around the same time—especially the sailors and those involved in shipbuilding—and the higher-ups have

been taking vacations around the same time, using up as many days off as they're allowed. Oddly enough, these men seem cheerful rather than troubled…

"Anyway, this sudden fervor has not been observed in civilian shipbuilding companies. You'd think any problems in the shipbuilding industry would apply to both…"

Sweet. This is going just according to plan… But if they don't start meeting the spirits of their ships soon, they might get suspicious that the Aeras *was a special case. Then the plans to "extend the lives of obsolete ships and shelve plans for new ones" is gonna lose momentum…*

…Oh, I know!

"…On that note, I hereby form the Yamano Ship Spirit Squad!" Mitsuha announced.

She stood before her newly formed team: the Yamano Munchkin Maids consisting of eleven-year-old Noelle, thirteen-year-old Ninette, and five-year-old Leah; the Yamano Mature Maids made up of Paulette, Katie, Lorena, etcetera; and others including Miriam, Gritt, and Ilse.

"That sounds dumb," Colette sighed.

Mitsuha ignored her and explained everyone's roles.

Colette wasn't a part of the Ship Spirit Squad. She had a duty to accompany Mitsuha in the New World. Besides, she had already made an appearance as the spirit of *Aeras.* Her face may

have been unrecognizable in the distance and darkness, but Mitsuha didn't want to take any chances.

The nobles of this kingdom were told that Traversal consumed life force (but she never explicitly said that it shortened her lifespan). To Count Bozes and her own servants, she'd clarified that she was slightly exaggerating the toll it took on her. She'd barely be able to use her ability at all otherwise. She had sworn them all to secrecy, of course.

To her servants, Mitsuha was the leader of their territory, their employer, the Lightning Archpriestess, and the savior of their kingdom. It was highly unlikely they'd betray her. They all worshiped the goddess and no one wanted to lose their position or put themselves or their families in danger. All she had to do to gain their full support was tell them that this was a "top-secret mission to protect the kingdom" and that it was a "divine command from the goddess."

Uhh, that sounded kinda bad… I swear they're doing this willingly, not because they fear divine punishment. I'm also giving them all a special bonus.

All right, let's do this!

"What's that?"

"A bird?"

"It's sitting on the mast and its wings are folded. There are no seabirds of *that* size."

A group of sailors were sweeping the deck of the *Salbarry*—Vanel's state-of-the-art sixty-four-cannon ship—when they noticed a creature perched on the mast.

The creature stood up. Its silhouette was clearly that of a girl in her early teens.

"**He-e-e-ey, kind sailors! Scrub me nice and clean, will you? That spot is filthy and itchy!**"

A long, shocked silence followed. A few seconds passed before the sailors gathered themselves.

"WOOOOOOW! MISS SALBARRY!!!" the sailors cheered.

The crew members inside heard the commotion and came pouring out. Even the captain and officers leaped out from the rear cabin.

"WO-O-O-O-O-OW!"

"SALBARRY! SALBARRY! SALBARRY!"

The sailors chanted until the girl waved and disappeared… Their revelry continued for a while.

"Inspection in progress!"

Officers in charge regularly patrolled their ship with non-commissioned officers to ensure the vessels were operational and its crew members were orderly. Every room was checked whether it was occupied or not.

During one such inspection, the officer in charge opened the door to a sleeping berth that should've been empty and found a surprise.

“Oh…”

The officers were dumbfounded. There was a ten-year-old girl sitting on a big box and nibbling on hardtack. The girl and the box (with Mitsuha hiding inside) then disappeared, leaving a half-eaten biscuit to drop to the floor.

The officers couldn’t utter a word.

“Great work today, boys!” said a woman’s voice.

“Huh?” A naval officer on deck spun around in surprise. Why would there be a woman on this old ship?

In front of him was a kind-looking lady who appeared to be in her late twenties. She was carrying a girl, who looked around five, on her shoulders. The girl was wearing what looked like a cloth bib that said “Cutter.”

The officer stood frozen, unable to make a peep.

“Mitsuha, another funny rumor has been circulating about the navy. Crew members from different ships have been spewing nonsense like ‘I saw my ship’s spirit’ and ‘I’m never getting off this ship for the rest of my life.’ Have they all going insane?”

“Heheheh, just according to plan…” tittered Mitsuha. “This should prove that *all* ships have souls—not just the *Aeras.* The navy’s gonna have a real hard time scrapping decommissioned ships now. The sailors and shipbuilders will strongly oppose it, and I’m hoping human rights—er, ship-soul rights activists will get involved too.”

“Huh?” Lephilia didn’t know what was going on, but she was able to deduce that this was all part of one of Mitsuha’s schemes. All she could do was force an awkward smile.

“Lady Mitsuha, standing on that mast was really scary!” Ninette complained.

“Oh, sorry. You weren’t in any danger because I was on standby to jump you away if you fell. But I guess I wasn’t thinking about how scary it’d be for you… I’ll give you extra hazard pay, okay?” Mitsuha said.

“Wow, awesome!”

I gave Rachel and Leah—who played the cutter boat’s spirit—extra pay too. The maids must be pretty thrilled about the additional income… If I pay them well, they’ll be happy to help me next time I need them. This is cheap if I think of it as an investment, Mitsuha thought with a grin on her face.

“Thank you,” Neleah mumbled out of the blue.

The young ladies of Society were gathered for a tea party.

It’d been one week since Princess Neleah’s failed escape from the royal palace. Mitsuha made sure to offer her a resolution before setting out for her ship spirit operation. She had Micchan send a letter as soon as Neleah returned to the royal palace from the Mitchell estate. It was addressed to Viscountess Neleah de Wechter.

They were certain that Neleah would see it; whoever sorted letters at the royal palace knew the aliases and peerages of the royal family members and staff. They'd know to give the letter to the third princess, and they wouldn't refuse a letter sent by a marquis's daughter. Sure enough, what Neleah just said was proof that the letter was received.

As soon as Neleah left the Mitchell estate that day, Mitsuha and Micchan held an emergency meeting. They wrote the letter and had one of Micchan's servants deliver it right away, making sure to write "Urgent" on the envelope in big red letters. They didn't know how much impact one letter could have, but they hoped dearly that it would help mitigate the royal family's chastisement of Neleah.

The letter stated that there had been an error in the background check into Viscountess Neleah de Wechter's family, and that upon reexamination of her female family members, she now had permission to buy makeup for her mother and sisters. They figured that would be enough to solve Neleah's family problems and ensure she wouldn't have to go into hiding. Considering that Neleah was still living at the royal palace, it probably worked out.

Mitsuha never actually intended to cut the royal family out from purchasing Yamano County goods. She only blacklisted the noble families who tried to obtain them with sleazy methods, but she knew there was no stopping the king from pulling strings and

getting what he wanted. Which meant that someone would have to yield and give up their goods.

Doing that would've damaged the king's popularity, but overthrowing the current royal government wasn't a part of Mitsuha's plan.

A change in Vanel's leadership was unlikely to alter its tendency to invade weaker countries. Far from it, a new ruler who seized power with a coup d'etat might choose to invade another country as their first move to appease bureaucrats in the financial and military world and distract the citizenry…which meant they'd send out expedition fleets to find new lands that were easy to exploit—that is, if they didn't care about losing the old ships near decommission and the lives of its crew. If they elected not to give compensation to the bereaved families, the risk of sending sailors on perilous voyages would be far outweighed by the boost to their approval rating. This was all hypothetical, of course.

A stable and conservative government that wanted to maintain the status quo—that was the kind of government that was easiest to control, and what suited Mitsuha's needs. An ambitious upstart overthrowing the king would likely lead to a period of terrible violence in this country. Any history book from Earth could tell you that.

And that was precisely why Mitsuha didn't blacklist the royal family. She kept Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred—the king's and prince's aliases or second peerages—on the list to maintain

the front that the viscountess was still angry at them. The *king*, however, would be able to buy whatever he wanted under his real name and title.

This led the shops who were carrying her goods to go ahead and add the king, the crown prince (AKA Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred), and their associates to their own no-sell lists. They likely assumed that Mitsuha banned the duo knowing their true identities, and that any shop that sold them Yamano County goods would get banned too. They couldn't take that risk.

I'm still not thrilled that the queen and two older princesses tried to threaten Lephilia Trading into selling them makeup, but I can understand how they must've felt. They couldn't bear the idea of falling behind the rest of noble society in terms of beauty trends. Yup, given their circumstance, I'd say there's a little room to show leniency.

That's why I told Neleah in the letter, "I'd be willing to forgive you, your sisters, and the queen as long as you reflect on your actions." I'm sure she explained this to them in the most patronizing tone possible, while making it sound like they owed everything to her.

…Yeah, this girl's a monster.

"My father," Neleah began, "has full authority over the nobility, the military, and the rest of the citizenry."

Well, duh… He's the king.

"And my mother has full authority over my father," she continued.

O…kay? I guess that's pretty common in normal households too.

"And currently, I have full authority over my mother and sisters."

Where are you going with this…

"And as the president and vice president of Society, you two have full authority over me."

Wait.

"A-Are you saying…?" interrupted Mitsuha.

"Yes. You two are currently the true rulers of this country," Neleah concluded.

"NO WE'RE NOT!" Mitsuha and Micchan screamed.

"His Majesty would *never* let the power structure of his household interfere with national politics!" Micchan was outraged.

I guess as a young noble, she doesn't want a royal to have such an incautious mindset. The fact that we can't tell if Neleah is being serious or joking makes this even worse. My gut is telling me she's being serious, and that terrifies me.

I'd better give her a little warning.

"Neleah, remember that to us, you're Viscountess Neleah de Wechter. All we know about your family is that you have a mother and two sisters. If they ever use a different family name with us or Lephilia Trading, they'll cease to be Viscountess Wechter's family and lose their privileges. It's Viscountess Neleah

de Wechter who's a member of Society. We don't know the third princess."

Neleah nodded fervently. It seemed like she got the message that she was just a viscountess here and that using her other title would cause trouble. She was eccentric and tended to act without thinking, but she wasn't dumb, and she didn't seem like a malicious person either. *Definitely a handful, though.*

Mitsuha extended kindness to the female members of the royal family to prevent the seed of discord from sprouting and causing a bloody feud, but she had no intention of doing any such favors for the male contingent. Whatever product the king and crown prince—Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred—sought couldn't have possibly caused a family conflict. Now that the women had their makeup, there was no need to rock the boat.

"Um, could I please buy some sweets and a folding knife for my little brother?" Neleah asked.

Huh… She's acting surprisingly humble. She might be weird, but she still loves her little brother like any good sister should.

"Of course!" Mitsuha and Micchan didn't think twice to answer. It seemed like Micchan also had a soft spot for "little brothers."

The other members went back to talking among themselves. They'd been watching Mitsuha's, Micchan's, and Neleah's serious conversation with concern, and must've sensed that the matter had been resolved.

They’re all so sophisticated. This is an exclusive club for beautiful young maidens, after all!

Chapter 76:
An Old Friend

"Have you gained weight, Mitsuha?"

"E…E-E-Excuse me?!"

That's the first thing you say to me after not seeing each other for ages?!

…But fine. Yes. Maybe, just maybe, I might *look like I've put on a* smidgen *of fat in recent months.*

It's not my fault, though! I had to attend so many parties in the New World, and that's on top of the get-togethers in my villages and my town and the parties that Zegleusian nobles and wealthy merchants invite me to in the capital. And just when I freed myself from New World parties, I started indulging in sweets at every Society meeting. Anyone would gain weight living like that!

As if all the invitations from the Old World, New World, and World-to-World (which I've been turning down) aren't enough, I even received one for a party in Japan the other day!

The invitation was from a solar energy company—the one that Mitsuha bought four solar energy systems from. Signing four contracts in a row led them to believe she was installing them on remote islands and mountain cabins all across Japan, and they wanted her to become the poster girl.

Mitsuha refused, of course. Being featured in an advertising campaign and becoming famous as "the beautiful young woman who pushes for the spread of solar energy throughout Japan"

would be problematic. A decent amount of people on Earth knew Mitsuha as a noble from another world. That included not just those who had attended the World-to-World Meetings, but also spies and government leaders who had secretly snapped photos of her.

When an employee from the solar energy company asked Mitsuha what she mainly used their systems for, she answered, “To attack a space base!”

Back to why I’ve gained wei—I mean, might *look like I’ve gotten a* tiny *bit thicker... The reason for that is world-jumping. I can go anywhere I want just by jumping to the other world and back. Not a penny spent. Unfortunately, I burn way less calories that way too...*

Damn it all!

“Are you done daydreaming yet?”

Oh, can it!

Anyway, Mitsuha’s old friend had returned from college for a long break. She was hanging out with Micchan Original. Made in Japan.

“I heard that you’ve been giving my dad’s store some business,” she said.

“Oh, yeah...”

Mitsuha’s demand for alcohol had grown into more than what a rural family-owned liquor store could supply, so she had entrusted Wolf Fang to acquire it for her. She would’ve felt bad about cutting off Micchan’s father entirely after he helped her out

so much in the early days, so she still went to him for alcohol that didn't go through Lephilia Trading, such as the more expensive brandy she gave as personal gifts to the guard station next to her commodity shop and anyone else who helped her. Her choice alcohols were Japanese sake, *doburoku,* and *umeshu* to name a few.

Doburoku had proven just as well-liked in the other world as it was on Earth. *They kept calling it "alcohol you eat, not drink." … Whatever that means.* Umeshu was popular too.

Micchan's father wasn't worried about selling her so much alcohol. It was obvious she wasn't buying it for herself based on the volume. Besides, she was buying not as the nineteen-year-old Mitsuha Yamano, but as the company "Colette's Sculptures." He wasn't selling alcohol to a minor; he was selling to a company.

Mitsuha wasn't writing the alcohol off as a business expense, which meant she could use it however she wanted. There was no need to convince anyone that it was an entertainment expense or some sort of employee bonus. She was only using the company name to get around the law and buy alcohol as a minor; this wasn't a tax reduction strategy.

"It sure pays to have friends!" Micchan grinned. "My dad bumped up my allowance because of the extra income! Thank you so much!"

Yup, I hinted at her dad to do that. I'm glad I could be of help. Ten thousand yen feels like a lot more to a student than it does to an adult with a job. Getting help from a friend when you need it

also makes you feel so much more grateful than when you don't. Micchan's done so much for me, and I hope this goes some way toward paying her back.

"Man, I'm surprised you started working instead of going to college…" said Micchan. "And I never in a million years could have predicted you'd become a sculpture artist of all things. And you tell me you're a successful one, too! Are you pulling my leg? You barely passed any of the art classes in school!" laughed Micchan.

"Rude! Art is never understood by the common folk! A mediocre art teacher had no chance of understanding my talent. That's the only reason for my bad grades!"

"But Mitsuha, no one else in our classes ever saw any hint of artistic talent in you."

Shut up!

"There are a ton of artists who were never recognized during their lifetime and only became famous after their death!" argued Mitsuha. "And my works are popular overseas! I'm an *internationally* successful artist!"

"Hmmm…"

Determined to convince her friend that she really did have a successful business in art, Mitsuha showed her a copy of her business registration form, her income tax return, overseas shipping documents, and more.

"Okay, okay. I'll acknowledge there's at least a 0.5% chance you really are a talented sculpture artist," Micchan said.

You still don't believe me?!

Well, I wouldn't believe me either, to be fair!

"But Mitsuha, are you taking the time to look for a job too?"

"This *is* my job! I own a small business and I'm the company president!"

"Oh yeah…"

Hmm, I guess she sees this as a part-time job or something rather than a career. She must be able to tell from the amount of alcohol I'm buying that I'm very successful, though. Her brain just can't wrap itself around the idea that I'm in the art business.

Oh well. There's no use pushing it. Even I think it's a reach…

They chatted about their mutual friends and what they've been up to, and waxed nostalgic for the past until it was time for Micchan to go.

"All right, see you later. College breaks tend to be pretty long, so I'll be around for a while," Micchan said.

"Okay. Looks like I'm gonna be away from home a lot, though. I'm absurdly busy…"

"I would hope so. Downtime is a bad thing for a small business owner. I'd better not hear you complain!"

"Ahaha… You're not wrong…"

Being a county lord is definitely not a small business… But I obviously can't tell her about that.

With that, Micchan left. She probably had a lot of other old friends she wanted to catch up with. *Like former classmates who*

were also in college… They'd have more to talk about with Micchan than me, thought Mitsuha.

Well, I'm sure I'll get a chance to see her a few more times before she goes back to college. There are other former classmates I can meet with too. I think old friendships can be rekindled as long as you're still in college when you get long breaks.

Staying in touch is gonna get much harder after that. Everyone will be swamped in their full-time jobs while juggling relationships like friends from college, new colleagues at work, romantic connections, marriages, local mom groups… They'll have so many people and things to manage. They won't have time for an old high school acquaintance who's still living in her rural hometown… which they'll rarely even visit…

Everyone is going to move on with their lives and change. Everyone but me.

"But that's okay. I am who I am, and I don't need to change!" she said out loud. She had Colette, Sabine, Lephilia, Rudina and Sylua, Micchan 2.0, the Bozeses, the citizens of Yamano County, the orphans she visited on occasion, the Wolf Fang mercenaries… and…

Wait—is that no different from Micchan 1.0 going to college, getting a job, and making new friends? I feel like she's growing apart from me, but from her perspective, I'm the one who's drifting. Surrounded by new ties and new friends…

People change over time. As do their roles and personalities.

Some people say that friendships have expiration dates. I think that's both true and untrue. I wonder if my friendship with Micchan has an expiration date… And if it does, would it be short like fresh produce? Longer like cup ramen? Rock salt? And if our friendship has expired, would Micchan or I even know that it did?

Eh, there's no use thinking too hard about that. Whatever will be, will be.

Que sera, sera!

Chapter 77:
You Can Do It, Soldier Boy!

“Mitsuha, I don’t know what to do…” the soldier boy whimpered. He was practically in tears.

“What’s wrong? Actually, let’s find a place to sit down before we talk. To the usual café?”

Mitsuha was meeting with the soldier boy to maintain their connection and, hopefully, to hear about the results of the ship spirit operation. But something about him seemed off.

There was no “spirit appearance” for the soldier boy’s ship, the *Leviathan.* Mitsuha intentionally left out his ship because she wanted to hear the thoughts of a sailor whose ship’s spirit hadn’t appeared. She didn’t stage a spirit appearance on all of the navy’s ships, of course; she only chose around ten of them. That was a small percentage of the fleet, so it was unlikely that he was upset about something related to that.

They grabbed a table at the back of the café. Mitsuha knew the soldier boy wasn’t going to open up if they sat at a window seat or in the middle of the restaurant. She stood out in this country because she looked foreign, and with him near tears, they would’ve drawn too much attention.

They gave the waiter their orders and made small talk. It wasn’t until their drinks arrived and the waiter walked far enough away from the table that Mitsuha got to the heart of the matter.

“…What’s wrong?” She lowered her voice so only the soldier boy could hear.

There’s no way he’d get tearful the moment he saw me because of something personal or work-related. Boys don’t like to show that kind of emotion around girls, and I’m sure that goes double for navy sailors. That must mean that whatever he’s upset about is directly related to me, and might even be bad for me.

But as far as the other sailors know, I’m only a girl friend. The navy doesn’t forbid associating with women, and besides being friends with the soldier boy, I have nothing to do with the navy anyway. Why would I cause any problems—oh!

“D-Don’t tell me… Did one of your superiors or senior officers order you to back off so they can ask me out?”

That has to be it! I wouldn’t be surprised if an officer tried to steal a junior’s rich and beautiful girl friend! It was only a matter of time until that happened! It’s not easy to find a smokin’ hot babe like m—

“No, that’s not it,” he said curtly.

Oh, I see…

“Then what is it?!”

I did not *sound offended just now. If the soldier boy thought I did, it was just his imagination.*

“The thing is… I’ve been summoned by the fleet commander.”

Whoa, whoa, whoa, what?! Mitsuha was pretty sure the soldier boy’s ship was led by a captain. Most ships were led by a commander, but the *Leviathan* was the latest model and the

flagship of his squadron. There was also a squadron commander with the rank of captain on his ship, but he just said “fleet” commander—someone way above the captain’s rank.

Well, there’s no reason to panic yet. I should hear him out first.

He went on, “You know the last time we met, you gave me the knives that my captain and squadron commander asked for? The squadron commander showed his off at a meeting, and…” the soldier boy trailed off.

Oh, I see. He was asked to get more of them… Actually, that can’t be all. I can understand feeling guilty about that, but it’s not enough to nearly cry in front of a girl.

“And…he was asked where he got it, and he mentioned your name along with mine…”

“Why did the squadron commander know my name?!”

“Sorry…” he whimpered.

The soldier boy must’ve said Mitsuha’s name when the squadron commander asked where the knife came from. There was no reason for him to think that revealing her name would be a problem.

He only knows me as Mitsuha. He’s asked for my last name a few times, but I always avoided answering. I could’ve just given him a fake name, but I don’t want to lie if I don’t have to. Plus, me giving him excuses instead of a fake name seems to make him trust me more. He believes that I’m hesitant to share about my family and social status because it might drive him away.

Anyway, I kinda have a hunch what the problem is…

“The bottom line is…” the soldier boy said sheepishly, “the fleet commander said he wants to meet you.”

“Gaaah, I knew it!!”

That was how Mitsuha ended up having to meet with the Vanelian navy’s fleet commander. A grunt like the soldier boy couldn’t refuse the summons, and Mitsuha couldn’t ignore the request of such a high-ranking officer just because she wasn’t associated with the navy.

Actually, she could do just that with no consequences. She was a civilian and had no obligation to follow the orders of a military person during peacetime. Especially not with the way she looked; a commander summoning an underaged girl alone to his office could turn into a scandal.

Refusing to go would jeopardize the soldier boy’s position, though. Mitsuha could simply disappear and never come back, but the soldier boy was a good guy and he’d helped her so much. Her disappearance would inconvenience him, and he didn’t deserve that. *“Inconvenience” is probably an understatement.*

It wasn’t like refusing to introduce your female acquaintance to a superior officer was against navy regulations. Refusing a petty officer’s order probably wouldn’t have caused much of a problem, but it wasn’t wise for a lowly recruit to oppose someone as high above as a squadron or fleet commander. He’d be treated like hell after showing such disrespect.

Knowing that, Mitsuha had no choice but to say the following:

“I gladly accept his invitation…”

“You don’t look glad about it…”

No crap!

“Sorry,” he apologized, realizing she was upset.

If you know why I’m mad, then you should know why I accepted.

I did it for your sake, you dolt!

“Right this way, please.”

Mitsuha thought the meeting would be on a ship, but she was instead taken to a building that seemed to be the navy’s headquarters. A young officer guided the two to a door that screamed, “This is the room of an important person!”

I’m not alone, of course. The soldier boy might be a grunt, but he was obviously gonna have to accompany me. Otherwise, the fleet commander would’ve been permitting entry to a girl who’s completely unaffiliated with the military to his office during work hours… Yeah, that’s a strike. Maybe even a double or triple play—an instant swap-out or game over for him. There was no way he’d do something so stupid.

The young officer who was escorting them was probably dubious about why he had to lead around a child and young recruit, but he treated them politely. After all, Mitsuha and the

soldier boy were guests of the fleet commander; that made them VIPs.

The officer knocked, “Your guests have arrived, sir,” and opened the door.

Huh… He opened the door without waiting for the commander to call out “Come in!” I guess the commander was expecting us. And this isn’t a private room so he’s probably not doing anything embarrassing in there. Maybe he didn’t want to seem intimidating to his guests. Eh, it doesn’t really matter.

Mitsuha stepped inside first. She was the one the commander summoned. The soldier boy was probably too nervous to be the first to march in and address his superior.

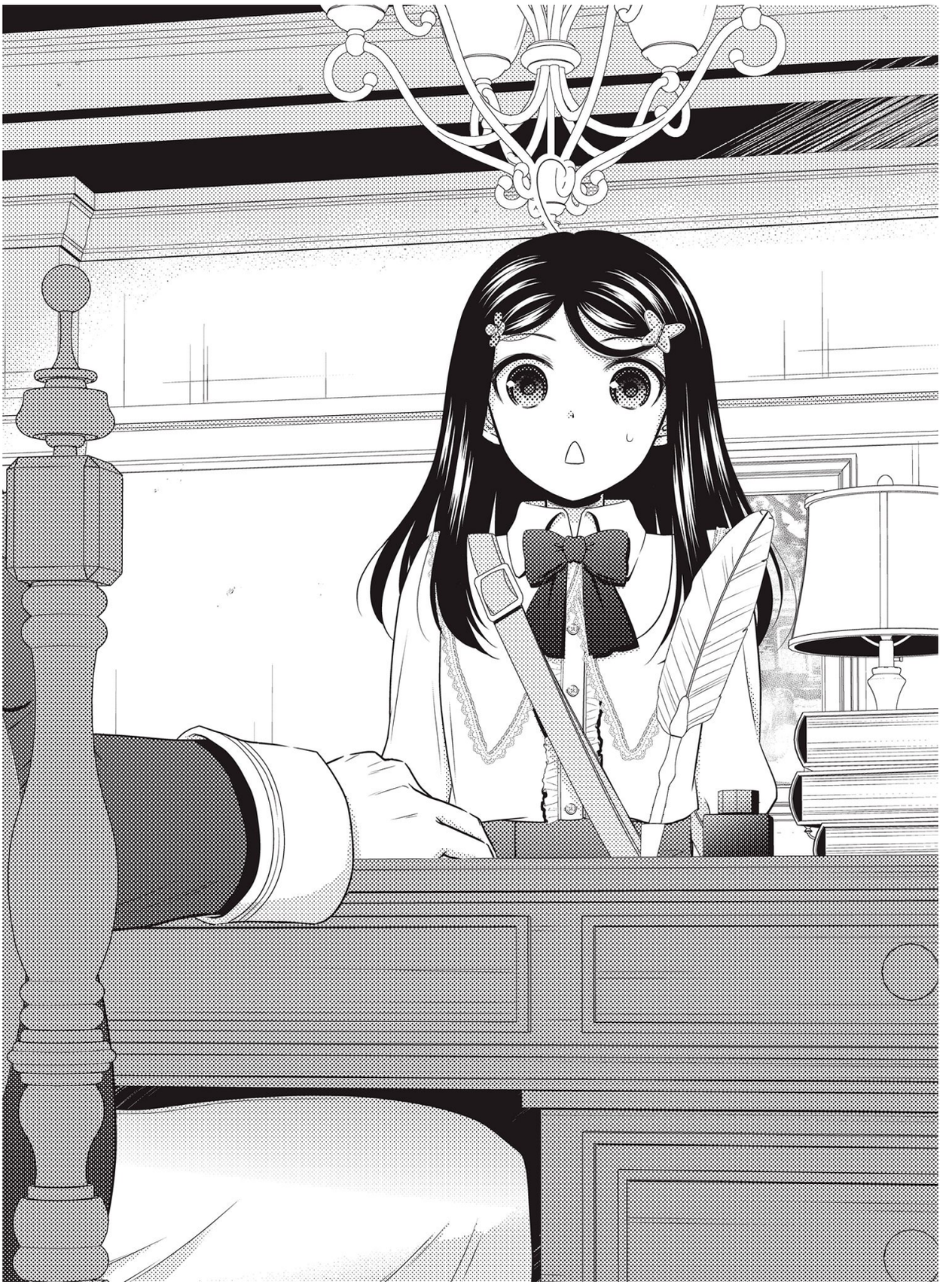
She greeted, “Pardon the intrusion. Thank you very much for invi—”

“I knew it… It *is* you,” the commander interrupted. He was sitting in a fancy chair facing the entryway.

Huh? What? He knows me? Did we meet at a party in the capital or something?

“We met at the bar, Lady Mitsuha. Don’t you remember?” the man said to his confused guest.

“Huh? Oh, are you one of the gentlemen who was at the bar that night?” Mitsuha asked.



Oh yeah… I didn't give my last name that night, but I did introduce myself as Mitsuha. He must've heard my name from the squadron commander and made the connection. There's no way Mitsuha is a common name around here, and the squadron commander might've mentioned that I look foreign. He must've realized that the novel knives and novel alcohol were foreign made.

…But what does he want with me?

"I was so worried about you! We sent a few men to escort you home after you left the bar that night, but you disappeared into thin air! You shouldn't scare people like that!" he chided.

Oh…

"I'm sorry…"

Yeah, a girl going out alone late at night—I can see why he'd be worried. Whoops…

"That is not the only reason I summoned you here. I also have an important matter to discuss with you—hey, you! Step outside and close the door behind you!" he ordered the young officer who was still in the doorway.

The officer left the room, and as soon as he closed the door, the commander leaned toward Mitsuha and the soldier boy—who he still hadn't invited to sit down.

He whispered, "…Can you get me some more of that alcohol?"

That's your important matter?!

"Oh, sorry. Have a seat," he said, motioning them to the lounge space. He rose from his desk and walked over to one of the lounge chairs. Mitsuha and the soldier boy may have been his

guests, but neither of them could take the seat of honor, nor could they be the first to sit down. Even the soldier boy was well aware of that etiquette.

In the military world, it's a strict rule that the person with the most authority in a group is the first to get in a car, and last to step off a bus, cutter boat, or elevator. My brother told me that once.

Mitsuha accepted the commander's hospitality and sat down after he did. *Sit down, soldier boy!*

"…So, can you?" the commander asked again.

"Yes, sir," answered Mitsuha. "In truth, I had asked you and the other gentlemen at the bar to sample the alcohol in hopes of collecting some feedback. If it was received well enough, I intended to mass-import and sell them as one of my country's products. I wanted the opinions of experienced drinkers."

"Your…product? Oh, and stop speaking so politely. It's weird coming from you."

Rude! But I get it. I was very casual at the bar, so it must feel strange to hear me call him "sir" now. It would definitely creep me out if a close friend suddenly started talking to me like a butler.

"…Got it," she said. "But you'd better not give us a court martial for contempt charges!"

"What kind of tyrant do you take me for?!" he retorted, looking appalled.

Mitsuha figured the commander would be lenient with her because she was seemingly of nobility, but the same mercy might

not apply to the soldier boy. *I don't wanna get him in trouble because of me.*

"Anyway," she continued, "I'm importing food, alcohol, and a bunch of other goods from abroad. That's where I got that vintage. I brought it to the bar to see what people with a palate for high-quality alcohol would think. I didn't want flattery or flowery words, so I observed your honest reactions as you all tasted it.

"Thanks to your positive reviews, I decided I would import it…but unfortunately, it sold out in the country it was produced in. It's very popular there. Currently, I can only buy a small amount for a very high price, which would hardly be worth importing. I could find a similar vintage from a different brewery, if you want. It'll be almost just as good."

The Hakushu 12 Year Single Malt Whiskey she brought to the bar had run out of stock. The brewery couldn't possibly produce twelve-year-old whiskey right away. Ordering a bunch of it now would be pointless, too; you wouldn't receive it until twelve years later when the craze had long since died down.

Mitsuha could probably find a bottle or two online for tens of thousands of yen, but she didn't want to go through the effort. She was certain she could sell them to Vanelian nobles, wealthy people, and military officers for a massive profit, but she wasn't into that sort of business practice. Besides, she'd feel guilty about taking it from the whiskey connoisseurs on Earth. Another

vintage series from the same brewery or a similar vintage from a different brewery would be good enough.

“Yes! Please! That would be wonderful!” The commander jumped on the offer.

Wow, he didn’t hesitate! And what’s with that malicious grin? I can practically hear his internal voice cackling… Oh, he doesn’t just want this alcohol for his own enjoyment. He wants to brag about it to others…

Most high-ranking officers in Vanel were nobles; money was never an issue. That meant the only way for them to truly show off was by obtaining something that money couldn’t buy. What he didn’t know was that she was already selling alcohol from Earth to nobles and wealthy people in the capital… But to be fair, it was only in small amounts, and she hadn’t introduced anything as upscale as the Hakushu 12 Year to the market.

Also, as far as this commander knew, Mitsuha was “the daughter of some noble family who supported the navy, a friend of a young recruit in his fleet, and a girl he’d met at his usual bar.” The more people he talked to about this alcohol, however, the more likely he was to learn that she was none other than “Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano,” the girl who was rapidly gaining influence in the capital.

There had to be plenty of nobles and military officials who had never heard of her. How could they if they spent all their time in the port town, never attending parties? The same went for her alcohol. However, what if he shared his whiskey with

someone who'd been to a party Mitsuha attended or was familiar with the alcohol sold by Lephilia Trading? The most he could find out was that it was the same alcohol as the one from Lephilia Trading. The conversation might've ended there if Mitsuha hadn't told the fleet commander *she* was importing it. That would mean she was connected to Lephilia Trading or Yamano County, and once he learned that county lord's first name, he'd know she was Viscountess Yamano herself.

Mitsuha didn't really mind that; she would've used a fake name from the start if she didn't want him to know her identity. There wouldn't be a problem unless someone noticed she was traveling back and forth between the capital and this town faster than physically possible. She didn't often appear in public in Vanel anyway; she spent most of her time in Japan and the Old World. It was also unlikely anyone would go out of their way to keep track of when she was in the capital and when she was in the port town. There wouldn't be any point.

The soldier boy hadn't said a word the whole time. He was as good as a decorative ornament in the room. Mitsuha was unsurprised; she was the one the commander summoned. A fresh recruit had nothing in common with a commander. He was merely used as a lure to get to her.

I hope he won't be awkward around me after finding out that I'm important enough to speak to the fleet commander like a casual friend…

The commander asked, “Can you get another one of those knives too?”

Yeah, yeah. What is it with guys and knives? First Theodore, now these guys… My brother was obsessed with them too.

He might find it boring if I get another folding knife. I should ask just in case…

“What kind of knife do you want? Another folding knife? Or something with a sheath? I could also get a dagger, a boot knife, or a tool knife.”

“Hmm, a folding knife will do for now.”

“For now”? Are you planning on ordering more later if you like this one?!

The commander probably assumed the other knives she offered would be no different from Vanelian knives except for slight variations in design. That wasn’t the case; knives from Earth were actually quite different because of the material used for the steel and grip, and the advanced engineering that went into cutting the shape. He’d likely notice that once he received his folding knife.

Mitsuha decided not to offer him a survival knife or a combat knife. Perhaps he didn’t choose a dagger or boot knife because they seemed too much like assassination weapons. He likely didn’t know what a tool knife was and assumed it was nothing impressive. It might not make a good weapon, but it’d be very useful as a work tool.

There were plenty of other useful gadgets that sailors and soldiers might've fancied, but there was no need to bring them up. She was only selling to the commander because circumstances demanded it, and she wasn't going to give him anything that would affect this kingdom. She didn't want them thinking her home country was technologically developed.

Her food products were well-liked in the New World, but that was fine. Delicious food had little to do with scientific advancement. Britain was proof of that. It never would've developed as a country otherwise. This was also true of the arts.

Mitsuha had been sneaking in some products from Yamano County among the wares she was selling to Lephilia Trading—in the form of containers that held the goods.

Even her villages were capable of making earthenware pottery. Such artifacts remained from the Jomon and Yayoi Periods in Japanese history, after all. Clay jars didn't need to be fired in kilns. They could easily be fired over open bonfires. You didn't need to use authentic equipment to create something slightly better than what was made in the Yayoi Period.

No one would buy the jars themselves, of course. But what if they were filled with salt or spices? She was buying the pottery from her people, filling them with liquids, powders, and pastes from Earth, and selling them in the New World. Whether her customers reused the empty containers or threw them away was their prerogative.

Anyway, the people from the New World would assume her country was primitive based on the low-grade jars and jugs. Her land was clearly blessed with an abundance of spices and gemstones and delicious food, but the pottery implied it was an undeveloped and lesser-known country—one that Vanel didn't need to be wary of and could leave to its devices as long as it made the country a profit from the export sales.

Mitsuha asked the commander questions like how much he was willing to spend on the knife and alcohol, how many bottles he wanted, whether he wanted strong or weak alcohol, whiskey or brandy, and liquor or liqueur. Once she'd gotten all the information she needed, she and the soldier boy were shown out of the headquarters by the young officer.

The soldier boy didn't act any differently toward Mitsuha after the meeting. He figured from the beginning that she was from a wealthy family, and that her appearance made it clear they were immigrants. That would explain having relatives abroad and her parents using that connection to work as merchants.

I intentionally spoke and acted like a rich girl since we met, so I'm not surprised he thought that. I'm impressed he didn't try to make me pay for things or take advantage of my wealth! He's a Vanelian gentleman! I'm sure he doesn't have any ulterior motives.

...He doesn't, right?

Chapter 78:
Party Catnip

“Five people would be perfect…” Mitsuha muttered.

“Five people? What do you mean?” Sabine asked. A bad feeling was creeping up her spine. Mitsuha mumbling to herself was usually a sign she was up to no good.

“You and Colette and me makes three. I have a bunch of candidates for the last two spots, including Beatrice, Lephilia, Micchan 2.0, and Princess Kak-Kak-Kak… I suppose a girl from the orphanage will do too…”

“What are you talking about?!” Sabine was getting annoyed.

“Oh, I was thinking about my party, or team, if you will. We could call ourselves the Mitsuha Girls, Mitsuha’s Angels, or the Mitsuha Peace Rangers… I’m thinking it should have five members.”

Sabine gave her a cold, sullen gaze.

“I’ll join! I’ll join!” Colette shouted as she pounced on Mitsuha from the side. She was way too big a fan of Mitsuha’s DVDs and Blu-ray discs to pass up such a fun opportunity. But while Colette was thinking of magical girls, Mitsuha was thinking more along the lines of *Super Sentai.* Playing Sentai heroes couldn’t be hard if they used guns as props, but not even Mitsuha could wield sparkly magic.

It also just came to light that Mitsuha had started calling Princess Remia of Dalisson “Princess Kak-Kak-Kak.” Colette and

Sabine chose to ignore this.

The viscountess decided to make an appearance at a Vanelian party for the first time in a very long time. She was the head of a noble house, which meant showing herself in high society was part of her duty even if she wasn't from the kingdom. She also needed to start gathering information on the latest affairs. The girls from Society were too young for the job; they could only attend birthday parties because they hadn't yet received their debutante balls, and it would've been odd for children to discuss trade and other heavy topics with adults. Mitsuha was believed to be underage too, but her peerage allowed her to attend noble parties, and because of her trade business, there was nothing odd about her conversing with adults.

With that said, Mitsuha was attending her first party in a while. She also wanted to pick up on gossip about the ship spirits.

Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred wouldn't be attending this party, of course. Mitsuha had warned the count who was hosting the party, and considering what happened to the host of the previous party she was ambushed in, he was unlikely to trick or betray her.

If he did, she would simply run away again. They wouldn't harm her even if they were able to catch her off guard and surround her. All she had to do was say that she had to go to the bathroom or she had to change, or that she would die if she didn't take a bath and make a fuss until they let her go. Then once she

was alone, she would jump to safety. People in Vanel didn't know about her Traversal ability yet, so she didn't want to vanish in front of them.

It didn't take a genius to realize that Mitsuha was likely to cut all ties with Vanelian high society if anyone antagonized her. She'd have no problem relocating to another country and starting over. No one was willing to risk being the sole reason she abandoned their country. Knowing that, she could attend parties without worry.

Today's party was for a navy faction. That didn't mean all the attendees were nobles or military men in the navy; it only meant that the host supported the navy and that the majority of the attendees did as well. Among the guests were nobles and officers from the army faction, people who had little to do with either faction, and even wealthy merchants who were recently granted peerages.

Marquis Mitchell was at the party as well, although Mitsuha chose this one without his help. She researched the event herself, had a cohort spread a rumor among the servants' network that "the viscountess seemed interested in attending," and found an invitation for it in her mailbox the next day. After sending the RSVP, Mitsuha checked with her cohort and got the scoop: the young maid who passed the rumor on to her master was rewarded with one gold coin, which she celebrated by rolling around ecstatically on her bed.

Anyway, Marquis Mitchell had been dismissed from his role as her social advisor—not that she'd been going to any parties recently. One might think he was relieved to be free of the duty, but losing her trust had been a blow to his reputation in high society. It seemed like most people knew that the king and crown prince were the ones at fault for their falling out though, not him.

He's not completely blameless, though! What made me so mad in the first place was his attitude and what he said to me afterward! But I'm not gonna go around telling people that… He is *my friend's dad…*

"Viscountess Yamano, it's been some time since I've seen you at a function. I hope you've been well." The first man to approach her was a viscount she'd met a few times. He was a senior officer in the navy, and had served on a ship before he was assigned to shore duty in the capital. He addressed her casually and kindly, avoiding the topic of trade and why she stopped attending parties, as expected of a distinguished sailor.

"Oh, yes," Mitsuha replied. "I've just been busy traveling abroad, helping out Society, and spending time with my younger sisters who were recently visiting from my homeland. I'm in perfect health!"

Even military men in the capital heard of Society.

"Oh? Sisters?" he said, sounding intrigued.

I brought up my "younger sisters" in case anyone saw me with Colette or Sabine, but whoa… Everyone's leaning over to listen to our conversation… Well, whatever. I'm sure the royal palace and

anyone with spies already know about Colette and Sabine. The Society members have probably told their parents too. I haven't sworn any of them to secrecy.

She decided to change the topic. "Um, I heard there have been appearances of something called 'ship spirits'…"

"Yes, there have! It's wonderful! The first spirit to show herself was of a warship called the *Aeras*—which was wrecked at sea—and my word, she looked like…" With that, the starry-eyed viscount launched into a long monologue.

Oh no… He looks just like how my brother did whenever I asked him about something he was dying to tell someone all about! I just stepped on a landmine…

He dragged on and on and on. There was no need for her to gather any further information from other officers and sailors. She heard it all. If someone made a list of the top ten people in Vanel who knew the most about the ship spirits, she'd now be on it. That was how much detail he gave her. He talked for so long that everyone who was listening in slowly scattered away.

"Interestingly, the spirit of the *El Halcon* took the form of a maid…"

Sheesh, he's still *going? Someone save me…*

"Viscountess Yamano, could I have your ear for a moment? I would like to tell you about my company," a count interrupted.

Oh no, now I have to deal with this too?!

"Viscountess Yamano, my daughter has taken an interest in this 'Society' of yours. Could you please allow her to join?" butted

in another man.

And the dam's been broken… Everyone was waiting patiently for the officer to stop raving about the ship spirits, but once they saw one guy elbow his way in to get the jump, they're all flooding in!

"Viscountess, I would like to discuss the jewels you are trading…"

"What is the market price of your grain?"

"About your spices…"

"Viscountess!"

"Viscountess!"

"Viscountess!"

"Viscountess!"

Mitsuha screamed internally.

I'm being swarmed!! I feel like a piece of catnip thrown into a gang of cats!

Just as a fight was about to break out over who got to speak to her first, the party host stepped in to calm everyone down. What actually put an end to the chaos was Mitsuha fleeing to the food corner. The rule of etiquette was that you couldn't speak to someone who was holding a plate of food. That code had saved Mitsuha more times than she could count. Whoever established the rule long ago probably did so not only because no one liked to be spoken to while eating, but also to save women who were being hounded by pushy men.

The Old World follows the same rule of etiquette. Did it happen to come about in both locations because it was inevitable in high society, or did someone from one continent travel across the ocean and introduce it to the other?

Regardless, I'm grateful the host of this party is doing his job (unlike a certain other jerkface count). I'll have to repay him somehow. It might serve me if a rumor spreads that I reward people for showing me good faith. That would make them keen to help me without me actually having to promise or do anything. Then I could occasionally hand out a gift or two on a whim—only in instances where there's no harm in it for me and it won't affect my profits or change the situation no matter who I gift to. Or if there's merit in it for me.

Yup, yup. I like the way I'm thinking.

It was time to rejoin the party.

The floodgates opened earlier because of one idiot who interrupted Mitsuha's conversation with the viscount, but that sort of thing didn't normally happen. High society parties were a place for upstanding ladies and gentlemen, after all. Embarrassing themselves with such tactless behavior was taboo. Or should've been.

Trusting in the dignity of nobles, Mitsuha set her plate down and picked up a glass (containing non-alcoholic juice). Holding a glass meant that you didn't mind if others spoke to you. *Makes sense, I suppose,* she thought as she headed for the crowd.

“Viscountess Yamano, I heard you’ve been traveling the continent. Have you come across anything that took your fancy?” a man asked.

That was how a conversation in high society should begin. It seemed like an innocuous question, but he was actually digging for hints about the purpose of her travels, which he probably expected would be diplomacy, business, or research.

Now this *is fun. Feeling each other out and waging an information war… This is where one demonstrates their faculty in high society.*

“Oh, I was just traveling for fun,” she answered. “All I really did was see the popular tourist sites… Well, I did take some time to visit the Lephilia Trading partner stores.”

Everyone within earshot flinched.

Hehehe…

It was obviously already known that there were Lephilia Trading partner stores throughout the continent, and only one store was appointed per country. And just now, it was officially made public that they were connected not just to Lephilia Trading, but to Viscountess Yamano as well.

The nobles understood what that meant: Viscountess Yamano could easily transition her clientele and base of operations to one of those countries if something were to happen to Lephilia Trading—whether that something was deemed a malicious act to the company, a threat to Mitsuha herself, or any sort of

“unfortunate incident” that would lead her to conclude that Vanel was unfit to be her base.

In one move, she conveyed everything she needed to and blocked her opponents from making theirs.

Her other plan seemed to be working too, which was steering the Vanelians to believe that her country was technologically undeveloped by packaging spices in poorly made containers.

“Viscountess Yamano, may I ask a question?” The man who spoke up was a viscount who looked around forty years old.

“Why, of course. What is it?”

“Why are the alcohol bottles from Yamano County crafted so exquisitely while the salt and spice containers look so crude?”

“Uh…”

Crap! I didn’t think about that! I decided to sell alcohol from Earth in the original bottles because transferring it all into containers from this world would’ve been a nightmare! It makes no sense for my country to make primitive earthenware pottery if it can manage bottles like these! Why didn’t I see that?!

“Oh, those bottles are imported from abroad,” she began to explain. “In my country, we recycle and reuse them! A sturdy and aesthetically pleasing bottle is crucial to alcohol storage and sales. You don’t want them to break or leak. And you definitely don’t want the liquid to have a weird taste or smell! Salt and spice containers don’t have to be as nearly as fancy because you can recover most of the contents if they break. There’s no need to spend as much money on those.”

Man, am I quick on my feet! That was a perfect answer!

“But it doesn’t make sense to use such brittle and cheap jars for pepper. Pepper and cumin are more expensive than alcohol, so why would you—”

Shut up already, sheesh! I don’t have time for this!

“Oh come on, stop nitpicking!” she blurted.

“…And that’s what happened,” Mitsuha concluded her story.

“Bwahaha! How the heck did it not occur to you that usin’ the original bottles would raise questions?! I’m sure people are wonderin’ about the writing on the label too…” the Wolf Fang captain laughed.

Mitsuha had no comeback. She’d returned to Earth and told the Wolf Fang captain what happened—while fudging some of the details—and that was his response.

“Pouring all that alcohol into containers from the other world would take freaking forever! Their bottle sizes are uneven so the content volume won’t be uniform. They’re fragile, and sealing them airtight would be impossible. The bottle caps would all have to be different… This isn’t my fault!” Mitsuha ranted indignantly. “Oh, and there’s this guy. I’ve become his girl friend, and—”



TH-THUNK! Every mercenary within hearing range spun around.

Huh? Why is everyone looking at me like that?

“I’ll be damned, li’l lady! You went and got yourself a boyfriend?”

Wait, what?! How did he come to that conclusion?!

Mitsuha stuttered, “Wh-What are you saying? I’m just his girl friend… Girlfriend… Wait, what did I just… HUH?!”

Something’s wrong here… Why does the word “girlfriend” seem to have two meanings in my mind…

*Girl friend (*onna-tomodachi*)… A female friend.*

*Girlfriend (*kanojo*)… A female romantic partner.*

*Oh! I was using the Japanese word “*gaarufurendo*,” which was borrowed from the English word “girlfriend” and has come to simply mean a “girl who is a friend.” The translation function in my head rendered it as the original English “girlfriend,” which has romantic implications. I thought “lover” was the word for the romantic kind! …Oh, that’s just the gender-neutral term? So “friend” is the correct word, male or female?*

HOLD UP!

…I didn’t call myself the soldier boy’s girlfriend to his face, did I? Let me think… No, I think I only said that in my mind. Thank goodness…

Oh, but if I say “gaarufurendo” in Vanel, it’ll just get translated into the local equivalent of “girl who is a friend.” So there’s nothing to worry about! This tragic misunderstanding only occurred

because we were using the same word across Japanese and English—I used the loanword with an evolved meaning and the mercenaries heard the original. I need to correct this misunderstanding or they'll tease me relentlessly…

There's nothing for it. I'll have to give the full explanation.

Mitsuha sighed.

Chapter 79:
Sabine's Older Sister

After finishing her party duty and getting teased by the Wolf Fang mercenaries, Mitsuha jumped to her general store in the capital. She was exhausted and just wanted to relax on the third floor without opening the shop.

She entered the living room on the top floor, and…

"Oh, hello… Pardon the intrusion."

…found Sabine's older sister—Chii, as they called her—bowing her head. Sabine was there too, but she was in the middle of a shooting game with her younger brother Leuhen. She didn't seem to notice that the store owner had come in.

"…Huh? Oh, you're back, Mitsuha," Sabine said, finally realizing after hearing her sister's voice.

"I hope you're keeping your promise to limit screen-time for video games… If not, I'm cutting it down to one hour a day," Mitsuha warned.

"Y-Y-Y-You wouldn't… That's absurd," Sabine sputtered.

Why is she acting so flustered? Wait a second… Mitsuha looked around.

"How curious," she said coyly. "So many candy wrappers all over the place. Gee, I wonder why…"

"Grk!"

"Even more curious. Sabine is suddenly turning so pale. Gee, I wonder why…"

“Gaaah!”

It was then that Chii interjected, “Lady Mitsuha, I ask that you forgive my sister. The thing is, she brought me here to protect me…”

Well, that changes things!

“Tell me more!” Mitsuha said.

“O-Of course. The truth is, my parents presented me with a marriage proposal against my wishes, so I fled here to hide. This is the only place in the capital where the royal palace’s guards can’t force entry into…”

“I see… But isn’t it the duty of highborn girls to marry whomever their parents set them up with to politically secure their family? Your life of luxury is paid for by the taxpayers’ hard-earned money. Enjoying your every privilege but then ignoring your duty is not the best look…”

“D’oooh!” Sabine and Chii uttered in shock.

“D-D’oooh!” Leuhen imitated them.

“You knew that very well, didn’t you?”

Sabine answered, “Y-Yeah, but I never thought I’d hear you say something like that. I thought you would, you know…”

“Help her?”

“Yeah…”

I believe in gender equality because I was raised in a world where women aren’t used as tools. But that was the norm there.

If I started campaigning for gender equality and for the end of primogeniture here in this world, I’d be ostracized immediately,

even with my reputation as the kingdom's savior.

Besides, radical change like that would cause the nobility to collapse. Large companies would have to split their assets when it's time to pass them down to the next generation, and that'll end up with a bunch of small- to medium-sized companies. They'd go bankrupt very quickly due to the high competition. The best I can do is wait for humanity to develop a sense of social awareness and learn to normalize those values naturally. One person making a fuss and twisting people's arms would only cause chaos, not progress.

Which is why I have no intention of pushing for social change. The best I can do is give them a gentle nudge in that direction.

"…I can't," said Mitsuha. "No single person can fight to reform society or oppose the king. Isn't it normal for royals to marry a person they've never met, anyway? Why are you so opposed? Is it someone you've already met and hate?"

Knowing the king, he was unlikely to marry her to any unsavory characters. Also, this kingdom was doing fine economically, and wasn't likely to be invaded anytime soon. If anything, it was politically stable enough to serve as the mediator for the entire continent's defense treaty against the New World. With its giant new ships, new weapons, and its zeal to develop them domestically, the kingdom was practically a charging bull. Circumstances definitely did not require surrendering a beloved daughter.

“…No,” Chii said. “He is the second prince of a neighboring kingdom, and all rumors say he is handsome, wise, and kind. But…”

“But?” *Maybe he’s a known philanderer?*

“I don’t know if I can marry a man who can’t get Japan to win in the war simulation game *World Advanced Daisenryaku*…”

“WHAT THE HELL KIND OF REASON IS THAT?!”

Mitsuha sighed, “…You haven’t even played it with him—wait, that’s not the issue. What’s the real reason?! Spill it!” *Geez, I wasn’t about to believe that load of bull…*

Crushed by Mitsuha’s rage, the second princess began to confess, “…Can’t you see? There are no game consoles, delicious candy, cakes, cold fizzy drinks, a *kotatsu,* or mandarins in his country…”

“This room is why you don’t want to get married?!”

Wait a minute… Mitsuha just realized something.

Noble and royal children in kingdoms like this one got engaged at early childhood and married as soon as they came of age. Chii was in her mid-teens, so there was nothing unusual about a partner being arranged for her. If anything, it was a wonder it had taken this long.

Which led to one mystery: the existence of the first princess.

Mitsuha pried, “Shouldn’t the first princess have to get married before you? She’s in her mid-twenties, right?—Oh no… Did she get married only for her husband to die young? And then

his younger brother became the heir, which left her with nowhere to go but back home?”

Pfft!

“Gross! What the hell, Sabine?!”

She’d spit her soda all over Mitsuha.

“O-Our oldest sister is only eighteen!”

“Huh?”

Are you serious?

“HUH?”

I was being generous by saying mid-twenties.

“WHAAAAAT?!”

Mitsuha had noticed the first princess’s interest in Alexis. In fact, Alexis was probably the only person who didn’t; he was as dense as the main character of a manga. Or maybe he pretended not to notice in order to avoid confronting her feelings.



But I thought she was just fawning over his heroic deed from the battle to save the capital and the establishment of his new noble house. You know, like those older Japanese women who squeal over young idols. I didn't think much of it. Now you're telling me she's actually in love *with him?!*

No! That's just wrong!

…Wait. What exactly is wrong about it?

Mitsuha's circuits were shorting.

"B-But then, as the oldest, shouldn't she…" was all she could manage.

"Her fiancé passed away two years ago and she'd been heartsick since," Chii explained. "All talks of engagements for her were put off for a long time. But she's been doing much better lately and has finally started to smile again."

Gaah! I knew it!

I'm, uh…happy for her. It would be a huge boon for the Bozeses too. They'd gain ties with the royal family. It wouldn't be a bad deal for the king either; the Bozeses are the cornerstone of the newly established naval force and the count is about to be granted the title of marquis. This is cause for celebration… I guess.

Alexis seemed to like Chii more, though. That was pretty clear when he received his peerage. But would a viscount be able to turn down a marriage offer from the royal family? Given how much the king dotes on his daughters, he's gonna do everything he can to make this marriage happen. Especially if the widowed one is ready for another engagement…

Stay strong, Alexis...

Chapter 80:
A Portrait of a Battle

“We’re at war.”

“Huh?”

Mitsuha was visiting the guard station next to her commodity shop in Vanel when one of the older guards dropped the sudden news.

I think I’m getting déjà vu. I’ve had this exact exchange before… But war? Since when was Vanel’s international affairs so tense? I had no clue all this time. I should’ve done a more thorough survey of the surrounding countries instead of focusing on this one.

This is definitely a crisis for Vanel. But how will this pan out for me?

“Oh, so you haven’t heard,” the guard said. “Eh, I suppose it is a tricky subject to discuss with a foreign noble, especially with someone as young as yourself. I figured you knew, but I’m glad I brought it up just in case.”

And I’m grateful you did. Mitsuha didn’t know if he told her because of the gifts she’d been giving, because he was concerned about her as a child living alone in a foreign country, or because his boss ordered him to, but it didn’t matter. The information he just gave her was worth dozens of gold coins.

Not that I’m actually gonna pay it! Well, I could easily afford it, and it’d be money well spent. I just don’t want him to come under suspicion for accepting a bribe from a foreign noble. That might be

unlikely, but I won't do anything that puts his livelihood at risk. I'll just show my gratitude with late-night snacks!

"Thank you so much! You saved me! I could've ended up getting stranded on foreign soil or having one of my merchant ships captured by an enemy nation! I'll repay you later, I promise!" With that, Mitsuha rushed back to her commodity store.

The first order of business was to gather information. Without it, she couldn't devise a plan.

Who was Vanel at war with? It obviously wasn't with her kingdom in the Old World. There was no way they could've learned about that war.

The military officers and high-ranking nobles at the recent party must've known; they just didn't bring it up with Mitsuha. That wasn't surprising. She may have been acquaintances with many of them and saw them at parties many times, but she was still a foreign noble, and they ultimately saw her as a business client. She wasn't a person to discuss domestic politics or international strife with, and they probably took care not to bring up those topics where she could hear.

On top of that, they thought Mitsuha was in her early teens. She'd also led people to believe she might be the daughter of a king's concubine tasked with investigating Vanel before her country reached out to propose full-scale trade. For all they knew, she would pass along anything she heard to her father. They

couldn’t risk telling her without knowing whether her country would side with Vanel or the opposing nation.

Regardless, I need intel. Who can I speak to candidly and rely on to have up-to-date and accurate information? I know only one person who fits the bill…

“Heya Micchan, what’s up!”

“You always show up with no warning…” Micchan sighed, rubbing her temples.

Oh, do you have a headache? I have some medicine for that.

“Is the marquis here?” Mitsuha asked.

“That’s *Marquis Mitchell* to you. You’re being way too casual. He may be my father, but he is the head of a high-ranking noble family. You can skip the formalities with me, but you should’ve started off with ‘Is Marquis Mitchell home?’”

Whoops, that was bad? I’ll try again then…

“Greetings, Lady Micheline de Mitchell… Is the marquis here?”

“You’re supposed to show respect to my father, not me! Urgh!” Micchan was steaming.

I did that on purpose, of course. I’ll call the marquis whatever I want. I refer to Count Bozes as Count Bozes—or sometimes just as “the count”—but I still respect the heck out of him. There was a time when I might’ve done as Micchan asked. He is *a high-ranking noble from a foreign country, he’s my friend’s dad, and he’s helped me out a lot.*

But not at the moment. I'm a little less cold to him now, but I haven't forgiven him entirely. And it's not like I'm calling him "Mitchy" or anything. Referring to him by his peerage isn't rude. Barons and viscounts call me "Viscountess Yamano" or just "Viscountess" all the time.

"I'm in a bit of a hurry, actually. I'm here today to tend to my primary duty," Mitsuha said.

Micchan noticed her friend's serious tone and fell silent. She sensed that she was here for business as a noble, and gave a firm nod.

"…I understand. Wait in the reception room," she said.

"…Good to see you. What can I do for you?" Marquis Mitchell asked as he stepped in.

Micchan had ordered a maid to escort the viscountess and serve her tea. Mitsuha knew the estate well enough by now to find her way to the reception room, but she didn't want to be rude so she let the maid do her job. She waited alone as she took a few sips of tea, figuring the marquis was probably talking to his daughter to determine the reason for her sudden visit, how to respond, and whether he should apologize for last time or avoid the subject altogether.

When the marquis entered the room, he did so alone. Micchan probably decided it'd be better if she wasn't there. She was a keen noble girl. *Or the marquis forbade her from joining us. But whatever. I'm only here for one reason.*

“I heard that a war is starting. I need to know everything about it in detail. The name of the country Vanel is fighting, the cause of the conflict, the difference in strength between both sides, the chances of victory, any potential points of compromise, and anything else important!”

“Uh…” the marquis hesitated. He obviously couldn’t share political secrets and military operations with a girl of unknown nationality. At the same time, his desire to mend their tattered relationship meant he couldn’t refuse her completely either.

I might be able to get him to talk if I play this right. Hmm…

“Whatever information that’s already been publicized would be more than helpful,” Mitsuha said. “Names of nobles who are colluding with the enemy country, soldiers who’ve fallen for their honey trap—things that the enemy would likely already know. Telling me that kind of stuff won’t change the circumstances. Any detail that wouldn’t make a difference whether you told a Vanelian noble, soldier, or merchant shouldn’t be an issue.”

The marquis stared at her in silent exasperation.

I guess that was pretty blunt… But that’s the message it boils down to when you remove all your filters like regard and reservation.

“Anyway, I was told that there’s a war, but I know literally nothing else! How am I supposed to act when I’m left in the dark?! Do you want to let one of the traitors trick me into selling them all my goods? My makeup, alcohol, and spices could end up being used for political maneuvering.”

Just like I'm doing right now!

"Grk!"

He's getting flustered! One more body blow!

"My small and fast cargo boats could get captured and looted…"

"Urgh…"

Now take this!

"The enemy nation could trick me into thinking Vanel is at fault and convince me to ally with them…"

Uppercut!

"Gah!"

Sweet, KO!

"Oh, fine…" The marquis grimaced.

Sharing information that enemy spies, traitors, and sleeper agents (spies that reside permanently in enemy territory until they're needed) could easily obtain wouldn't do any harm, as long as it had nothing to do with political decisions or specific military strategy.

He's a marquis; I'm sure he can figure out what he can and can't tell me, Mitsuha thought.

Now let's hear it all…

According to the marquis, a nation called the Kingdom of Noral picked a fight with them. It was located three countries to the east of Vanel.

The two kingdoms had been at odds for a long time, and had directly competing interests. They were the two strongest naval powers on the continent, always disputing over the control of colonies and influence on surrounding countries.

Tensions had been especially high recently due to an incident that occurred in one of the colonies. Noral wanted to steal the colony, and they finally made the first move by commanding their privateers to attack a cargo ship traveling from the colony to Vanel. When a Vanelian warship fought back, Noral falsely accused Vanel of attacking their civilian ship.

The marquis explained, “The other nearby countries know how ludicrous the claim is, but that doesn’t mean they’ll intervene on our behalf. Noral just wants an excuse to pretend they were in the right, regardless of the truth… I’m sure they’ve already profited greatly from whatever that was on the targeted cargo ships.”

Eh, I guess that’s typical…

He also mentioned that the recent commotion surrounding the Goddess’s envoy and the ship spirits were partially responsible for this situation too. It was plausible that Noral suspected Vanel of staging those phenomena to increase the navy’s popularity and budget. To them, it looked like Vanel was strengthening the navy in preparation for war.

Yeah, I guess other countries would see that as a publicity stunt to boost Vanel’s own popularity.

In reality, though, they were staged by Mitsuha to weaken the Vanelian navy. Noral didn't know this, and wanted to deliver a punch that would nip the growth of Vanel's navy in the bud. It was unlikely they intended for this war to continue until either side was devastated; destroying a fleet or two and taking some prisoners for ransom would've been enough—and stealing a colony while they were at it.

I guess that's how countries of these times operate… How Vanel fares in this war isn't really important to me. I just need to figure out what outcome will benefit me and my own country the most.

"So Vanel is definitely decided on opening hostilities?" Mitsuha asked.

"Yes. Making concessions won't work; the Kingdom of Noral will only continue to escalate their provocations. Our citizens, nobles, and military authorities wouldn't stand for concessions anyway. Anyone who suggests such a thing will face heavy criticism and be suspected of colluding with the enemy. It'd be a fast way to lose one's honor and position, so even if one did think concessions would be wise, they'd never say so.

"That said, I guarantee no noble or soldier will want to back down after Noral's underhanded move. This conflict will not cease without a skirmish."

Yeah, that makes sense…

He added, "We do have to be careful it doesn't turn into an all-out war, but I doubt the enemy wants that either, given the

stake is just one colony. It'll likely be settled over a naval battle."

He was right that an all-out war would serve neither side; both parties would be left in shambles no matter who won, giving a third country the opportunity to swoop in and profit from their conflict and end Vanel's and Noral's reigns as superpowers. Land warfare was never an option; attacking the other country directly would require either army to travel long distances while passing through multiple countries that weren't involved with the conflict. In the end, an all-out war would lead to both sides exhausting most of their naval strength, allowing a third naval power to throw its weight around.

I wonder why he's so calm about all this… Is it because he's a member of the army faction and thinks he won't have to do much? This war will have a massive impact on Vanel's future, though. I'd expect him to be more bothered.

"That's all I can share," he concluded. "If you want to know more, you'd have to ask someone with the authority to decide how much is okay to tell a foreign noble. I'm not going to risk getting decapitated or having my peerage revoked for leaking state secrets."

Mitsuha couldn't blame him for that. He might've wanted to win back her favor, but doing so would be meaningless if he lost everything. She didn't want to be the reason his family got cast down to peasantry, leaving Micchan in the streets with no means of supporting herself. *Well, I'd adopt her and take care of her myself if that happened, of course.*

“Who would that person be?” she asked.

“His Majesty the King, obviously!”

“Ah…”

I should’ve known… I really don’t wanna see that guy again.

She just knew the king would use the war as an excuse to get her to spill the name of her homeland. War was expensive, and even small and weak countries could be useful politically if they were on your side. He might not have pressed her too hard during peacetime, but now, he was about to burn through massive amounts of weapons, ammunition, ships, soldiers, and money. It wouldn’t be surprising if he abandoned all pretense and took a more aggressive approach. She didn’t want any part of that.

“Eh, I’ll pass,” said Mitsuha. “I doubt he’ll tell me much more than you, and I don’t need to hear him ramble on about his one-sided predictions and wishful fantasies about the outcome. I can conjecture on my own based on the current facts. Thanks a bunch!” With that, she stood up to leave.

“Wait! Don’t go!”

“What is it?” *I really want to go…*

“I did as you asked. It’s only right that you return the favor.”

I guess he has a point there. Oh, fine…

“Well? What do you want?” Mitsuha huffed. She didn’t feel like sticking around any longer. He was the one who botched their relationship, so she felt no need to be polite.

The marquis hesitated. “Could you…please forgive me for my recent rudeness toward you?”

Wow, has he been doing some introspecting? I’m not a monster; I’ll hear him out if he’s willing to apologize. I know the king was the real culprit behind that incident, anyway. On the other hand, I don’t want to lose the leverage I’ve gained over this guy…

Oh, I know!

“If you insist…” said Mitsuha. “I’ll forgive you by fifty per. You can make up for the rest another time.”

“…Okay, fifty percent it is. I suppose I’ll earn the rest of your forgiveness next time we meet.” The marquis looked relieved. It was a given she was going to come back for more information, which was when he’d earn the other half. After that, they could go back to their previous relation.

“Maybe. You have another nine hundred and fifty per to go, though.”

“What the heck?! You need to go back to elementary school and relearn how percentages work!”

There actually is a way to indicate parts per thousand instead of parts per hundred. It’s called permille instead of percent, and is expressed with this symbol: ‰

Mitsuha took off, leaving the squawking marquis behind.

I said bye to Micchan before I left, of course. She’s my friend after all!

“‘Train in combat,’ you said?” the king asked.

“Yes,” Mitsuha answered.

“Do you mean ‘train *for* combat?’”

He was visibly confused.

“Nope.”

“Do you mean simulated combat then?”

“Nope, not that either.”

“Hrmmm…”

Mitsuha was speaking to the king of Zegleus—her second home after Japan. They were in a small conference room that was used for private matters instead of the audience hall. The king had summoned Mitsuha, the chancellor, and Marquis Eiblinger. Even the crown prince (Sabine’s older brother) was sitting in.

Yup, the four of us are the usual members of these inner circle meetings. The crown prince is kind of a fifth wheel in the room… as well as Sabine and the first princess. Why are they here?! I guess we’re having this meeting with the usual crew and a couple of extra guests.

Count Bozes normally attended these meetings too, but he was back in his territory. The harbor city was getting busy so he didn’t have much time to be in the capital these days.

Sucks, but that’s life.

“It’s much more likely the war will end without *those* guys needing to get involved,” Mitsuha said. “But it’s best to be prepared. What I want right now is your pre-authorization to engage in battle and to inform the crews. This could end up being

valuable combat experience for them. All they've been able to do for practice is fire a cannon five or six times on land because of the limited ammunition…"

The people of this kingdom were finally getting a handle on simple iron cannonball production, but gunpowder was still in the primitive stage. Simply making it wasn't that hard; Mitsuha had looked up the method on Earth, and she had more than enough funding from the kingdom. However, there were a lot of problems they had to sort out first like safety and uniformity in force, and finding a stable way of obtaining potassium nitrate in large quantities.

Mitsuha wanted them to use shells—projectiles that were packed with explosives—but Zegleus still had a long way to go. Not only did they lack cannons, but they also didn't have a reliable way of obtaining propellants (gunpowder charge), not to mention figuring out the explosives, the detonation system, and a whole host of other issues. Currently, a timed detonation system using fuses was the best option.

They could make cannons if they simply mimicked what they found on the captured ships, but those were only for technical reference, nothing more than a checkpoint to pass. Mitsuha wanted to focus on something more advanced: rifled muzzleloaders that used cylindro-conoidal bullets. Vanel and Noral were stronger countries with more sophisticated technology, so if Zegleus wanted to gain an advantage with its

fleet of small and few ships, they'd have to improve their cannons.

It's gonna be a while before any of that becomes a reality, though. Until then, all we have is the ammunition from the captured ships, and once we run out, our cannons and ships will be rendered useless. Knowing that, of course one would stop to question: is it really a good idea to waste our precious ammo when our country is not in danger?

Mitsuha clarified, "The only functional ships we have right now are the three ships. Counting the *Aeras*—when it's repaired—and the new ship currently under construction, that's five. Unfortunately, the captured ships are what the enemy would consider outdated, and we're not close to being able to develop cannons for our new ships. Saving ammunition isn't gonna make much difference when we're so heavily outmatched. Especially when our sailors have hardly practiced with the cannons at all."

"Urgh," the king groaned.

We only have enough ammo for one naval battle and a bunch of underexperienced sailors. Do we preserve it or do we spend it extravagantly? That is the question. It's not like we're gonna use all of it, anyway. Just enough for a few volleys. There's also no guarantee we'll have to fight. I just want to talk this over and get permission now. We might not have time to hold a meeting when the scenario arises.

The room fell silent.

“Her suggestion sounds perfectly reasonable to me.” It was Marquis Eiblinger who spoke up.

“Huh…” the king uttered at his words.

“Just think about it. We have three warships that the enemy considers dated and only enough ammunition to last one battle. We’re also planning on removing the current cannons from our ships once we finish the new models. Why not use them and give our sailors a little experience?

“Viscountess Yamano is the one who obtained all of it for us anyway. She knows the situation better than anyone, and I see no problem with entrusting everything to her judgment.”

Marquis Eiblinger was remarkably frank with the king. He always spoke to him as a friend in private settings; they went way back and trusted each other like brothers. The king didn’t appoint him as the supreme commander for nothing.

Silence reigned once again.

In the end, Mitsuha’s request was granted and it was decided that the other cabinet ministers, military officers, and crews of the ships would receive the specifics of her plans.

The crown prince didn’t say anything during the meeting. He was only there to observe and didn’t have permission to speak. The only true participants of the meeting were Mitsuha, the king, the chancellor, and Marquis Eiblinger, making it a small gathering of the king’s closest advisors. That was why Marquis Eiblinger was able to speak to the king like an old friend.

What about Sabine and the first princess, you ask? Haha… I'm just as baffled as you are… Why the heck were *they there?*

Mitsuha didn't want to involve Zegleus in a war between two New World countries, of course. Sacrificing lives in a battle they had nothing to do with would be the height of folly. But she feared what would happen if Vanel or Noral achieved a great victory and became a dominant superpower in the New World. Once they established control over their part of the world, they might turn their eyes to the distant horizon. That was when they'd dispatch expedition fleets to discover undeveloped lands they could invade to steal, enslave, and exploit in perpetuity.

She couldn't let that happen.

Mitsuha jumped to the naval port in Vanel. She scanned the dock for the *Leviathan*—the soldier boy's ship—but it wasn't there. There was nothing strange about that; ships couldn't just sit in the harbor all the time. Over half the crew of a sailing ship was made up of low-ranking seamen whose only job it was to help steer, and they needed daily training. The *Leviathan* had been present every time Mitsuha had come here so far, but that might've been pure luck.

"Seamen" in this case referred to the helmsmen who steered the ship, separate from the frontliners and artillery men.

Wait a minute, there's hardly any ships at the pier at all—oh! The fleet's been deployed!

Mitsuha had assumed the fleet would be here because the war was still at the diplomacy stage, but given that fighting was now inevitable, it made sense for the slow-moving ships to set out immediately to protect the colony and sea routes. The *Leviathan* was just the flagship of its squadron and not of the overall fleet, but as one of the advanced sixty-four-cannon warships, there was no way it wasn't going to be utilized. The only crafts left were support ships, various noncombat ships, and decommissioned vessels that would never set sail again.

...What should I do? I don't even know where the fleet is right now. Or the enemy fleet's location. Where are they fighting? Don't know. When are they fighting? Don't know that either. I'm gridlocked!

The soldier boy, the fleet commander she'd become acquainted with—they'd all left. The fleet commander spent his time on land at headquarters, but he was obviously going to accompany the fleet on the flagship in the event of a full-force dispatch.

Most of the officers she met at the bar were likely gone too. Even if some were left at the base on shore duty, they wouldn't tell a random girl they'd met once about the fleet's plans or route. Besides, she had no way of finding them except happening to meet them at the bar again. None of them gave her their names or posts. She also doubted many people would go out for drinks while most of the higher-ups were heading for the front line.

Hmm... That leaves me with only one option...

“…So yeah, I’d really appreciate your help.”

“Any time!”

Mitsuha was speaking to the usual diplomat from the country she sought help from.

Naval air station, I choose you!

A maritime patrol aircraft was the best choice for this occasion. All she needed was to find the fleets at sea. She wasn’t looking to attack. The mission demanded long flight duration (rather than distance), search capabilities, and the ability to plot multiple targets. There was only one aircraft that checked all those boxes.

Mitsuha had no intention of interfering with the fleets, so she didn’t need a plane with assault capabilities. Anti-ship missiles were expensive anyway, and would’ve been overkill against sailing ships. *No attacks unless absolutely necessary for self-defense,* she told herself.

If the situation called for a raid, it’d be much easier and cheaper to use a patrol aircraft equipped with 76mm or 127mm rapid-fire guns or 20mm to 30mm autocannons. Anti-ship missiles and large-bore artillery were hardly necessary against wooden sailing ships that could only chuck iron balls from two or three miles away.

The crew was different from last time. Mitsuha would’ve preferred the same team, but that apparently would’ve led to fights among the personnel.

Well, I get how they feel. Who wouldn't want to visit another world? It'd be a great story to brag about to their future children and grandchildren—if their NDAs are ever lifted. Naval or academic personnel, anyone would be fighting over a seat on the aircraft.

Most of the scholars were new faces too, unsurprisingly. The few recurring members appeared to be especially gifted or in positions of authority.

I hope none of them are planning anything nefarious like last time. I ain't gonna give them a second pass. If anyone tries anything funny, I'm cutting ties with this country completely.

All right, prepare for liftoff!

Finding the Vanelian fleet was quick. It clearly only departed the harbor a few days ago. The Noralian fleet was easy to locate too. The crew plotted the positions and speeds of both fleets and decided to withdraw for the day.

If they'd been tracking modern-day ships from Earth, they might've made a rough estimate for when the two fleets would meet. That was pointless here, however. The speed of a sailing ship would vary greatly depending on the wind and ocean currents, and they weren't headed directly for each other. Neither fleet could know exactly where the other was or what their next move would be.

Anyway, it'd be a while before the fleets met. Mitsuha was about to jump the aircraft back to Earth—intending to return in a

few days—when the crew pleaded for her to let them continue to fly until they ran out of fuel. She granted their request and let them navigate freely over the New World. They all busied themselves taking pictures and measurements.

Flying over new land benefited Mitsuha too because it gave her new locations she could jump to, but she didn't want to be the one to ask. Flying required dozens of tons of fuel, consumable goods, hired personnel, regular maintenance, and other running costs that could easily bring the total expense of a flight up to tens of thousands of dollars. She was relieved when they suggested it.

The aircraft returned to the base safely. The crew held a quick briefing session with Mitsuha afterward.

Huh? They want to know if we can go in a seaplane or a large helicopter next time? Oh, they want to touch down on water or land… Yeah, I'll bet even a tiny sample of ocean water would provide a great chance for discovery.

I'm gonna remove any bacteria and other microbes when I jump back to Earth, though. You guys'll have to be satisfied with measuring the composition of the saltwater.

"Thanks guys!" Mitsuha said.

Dismissed!

"In short, Vanel and Noral are about to engage in naval combat," Mitsuha said. "Which brings me to the question for you guys as the crew of the former Vanelian expedition fleet… Suppose the

Vanelian fleet ends up on the verge of defeat—and despite the fact that returning to your home country is impossible—would you be willing to put on one last grand show with the help of the Goddess's power? Your deeds might lead to good fortunes for your families back home… I'll pay you all a military salary, of course."

"Ye…" the sailors uttered.

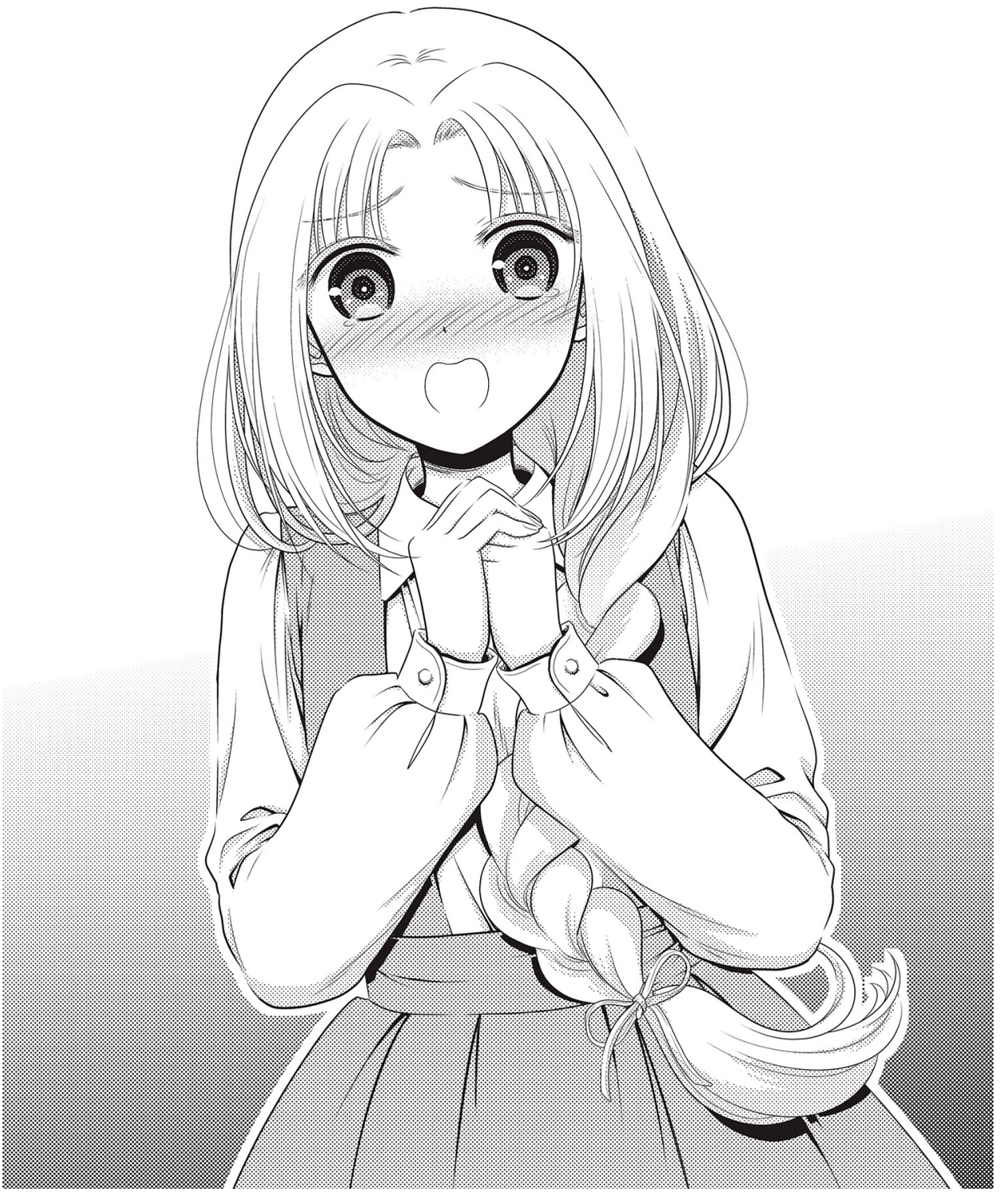
"Ye…?"

"YES, MY LADY!" they all sang.

And just like that, Mitsuha acquired a host of hardcore drill sergeants who were willing to galvanize the novice Zegleusian sailors. She wasn't about to go into battle with an army of newbies with zero combat experience. Firing volleys with accuracy while accounting for the sway of the hull on water required precise timing. You could only develop a feel for that by living through many deadly battles.

Well, that won't be too big of a hurdle since I'll be present. But I need them to eventually be able to manage without me. Who knows, maybe I won't be around for the next battle.

This one will be a tutorial round where the players take no damage. But this is the real world, not a game. Once they finish the tutorial and leave the starter village, a slime may not be the first thing they encounter…



Mitsuha went to Lephilia Trading to hear how the war was affecting the populace and was greeted by…

“I’m so sorry!”

…Lephilia cowering before her.

“What are you apologizing for?”

“We sold all of our alcohol and other luxury foods and products without restriction, and now we’re completely out of stock! This has thrown our sales plans completely out the window!”

“Wha…”

Lephilia told her boss the whole story. Mitsuha grasped the situation.

When the departure of Vanel’s fleet was announced, friends and families of the ships’ crews flocked to Lephilia Trading. They got on their knees and begged to let them buy the goods so they could spend their final moments pampering their loved ones and take some of the goodies along on their voyage. It would’ve been cruel to turn them down.

Lephilia was a Vanelian citizen, and bluntly refusing them would’ve gotten her branded as unpatriotic.

Noble houses sent their butlers—the nobles didn’t go themselves, of course—who begged for permission to buy Lephilia Trading’s goods. Such an act would normally be unthinkable toward a common shopkeeper. Lephilia and her employees could hardly be expected to be prepared for that.

“Yeah, that’s understandable… I don’t blame you at all!”

Lephilia broke the rules and sold to noble houses that were blacklisted, but Mitsuha wasn’t a monster. Given the circumstances, it was easy to forgive. The people of this country believed their navy would win, but they knew that even a complete victory would still cost a few casualties.

Imagine Japan going up against five hundred Grumman aircrafts with two hundred zero fighters; shooting down all the enemy planes without losing a single one of theirs would be too unrealistic even for a fictional war story. In a realistic one, Japan would lose around seventy to eighty planes, even if they had the latest equipment or secret weapons. I mean, that’d still be an incredible victory.

In other words, no matter how dominant the win, it was bound to end with many people who would never return. The chances of it being the final farewell dinner was not slim for anyone. And of course, no one could deny the possibility of a massive defeat.

“I’ll replenish the stock as soon as I can. Draft a new sales plan and send it to our customers who backordered!”

We’ll get through this somehow!

“…So, your older brother too?”

“Yes. He’s an officer on the forty-cannon ship *Emsart*…”

The Society girls had family members and acquaintances among the crews of the dispatched fleet. There weren’t a lot of

honorable jobs available to the fourth and fifth sons of noble families.

“Let us all pray to the Goddess,” Micchan said, and everyone put their hands together.

The Vanelians no longer just *believed* in the Goddess. In their minds, the recent appearances of the Goddess’s envoy and the miracles that occurred had proven her existence to be a hard fact. Furthermore, these girls were convinced that they were to thank for one of those miracles. They had faith in the power of their prayers.

The public had come to refer to the members of Society as “saintesses.” It wasn’t an officially recognized title, but the churches had done nothing to discourage this; far from it, they started using the girls for their own publicity. Mitsuha had Micchan issue a warning to all the girls—“Don’t let any of them take advantage of you.”—but there was probably nothing to worry about. They weren’t ignorant commoners and their parents were already handling the situation.

Ships didn’t often sink during naval warfare, but it wasn’t an impossible scenario. Even if it didn’t, sailors could still be killed by incoming cannonballs, bullets, fires, and direct combat with enemies who climbed aboard. They could even be forced to surrender and taken prisoner after their ship was disabled. Not all prisoners made it home in one piece.

…You’re wondering if I’ll intervene? I do plan to, depending on the situation, but I’m not gonna do anything crazy like try to save

every single sailor. If both sides could equally wear down each other's fleet and maintain a standoff, that'd be nice.

You could make rough predictions for a modern naval battle based on factors like the warship's class, the weapons, the sailors' experience, and the size of the fleets, but there was no telling with sailing ships. Too much came down to luck and uncertain facets like the commanders' skills and the weather. The very first shot could happen to hit the enemy flagship's stern, take out the command center, and immediately obliterate a fleet.

Battles are unpredictable. And of course, I can't pick and choose who falls under my protection and ensure the girls' family members' safety if I tried. I'm just a fake envoy of the Goddess, not the real deal…

All I can do is pray with my friends that their loved ones will come back safe and sound…

A few more reconnaissance flights had been arranged since the last one. They didn't have to have that many because the Vanelian fleet was sailing straight ahead and the Noralian fleet was already cruising on territorial waters of the colony at issue. There wasn't much to observe.

On one of the flights, they pleaded for Mitsuha to take a large helicopter. That wasn't a problem; the helicopter had a radar too, and the fleets' estimated locations were in a small range, meaning it'd be easy for her to jump nearby. They only really needed the maritime patrol aircraft the first time when they had

to search a wider area to locate the fleets. Mitsuha did want a radar just in case, though.

Once they finished their reconnaissance, she allowed the crew to touch down on uninhabited land. The academic team was in a frenzy as they tore out of the helicopter with bags full of containers for collecting samples, and the military men—who were hired as guards for the civilian scholars—followed close behind to be on the lookout and help them capture animals.

Mitsuha was only letting them take a select number of samples, of course. Animals, plants, and minerals from this world were valuable bargaining chips to her. True, this country was letting her use their military aircrafts, but opening up an all-you-can-sample specimen buffet wasn't a fair trade. As such, she limited them to one dead animal, several stalks of one plant species, and one piece of mineral ore.

She'd warned beforehand that sneaking anything past her would be impossible because she could block any extra samples from being jumped back to Earth, so no one tried her.

The reason the scholars brought so many containers was so each person could grab a handful, split up, collect as many samples as they could, and then reconvene to discuss which was the best choice to take back home. Tensions ran high during that meeting, to say the least, and it ended up turning ugly. They all banked on their own sample becoming the key to a major discovery. If the NDAs were ever to be lifted, they'd be revealed as "the person who brought mineral XYZ from another world" and

their name would go down in history, at least in their field of study.

Yeah, I can see why none of them wanted to budge…

Be it a mineral, plant, or animal, they all felt the same.

After the scholars argued for long enough with no sign of progress, Mitsuha scorned, “If you don’t choose your samples in the next ten minutes, you all go home with nothing.” That was when things got violent. The debate devolved into a brawl. It turned out even the most rational and amiable-looking scholar could pack a punch that would knock a burly soldier—who was only trying to stop the fight—off his feet.

The scholars kept swinging at each other as if they didn’t care who got hurt. It was a genuinely terrifying sight to behold.

To be fair to the soldier, he was holding back because he didn’t want to injure the scholar and was clearly caught off guard. Anyway, I learned my lesson: don’t do anything to provoke a scholar when it comes to their research. They won’t think twice about putting their life on the line.

The botanists begged Mitsuha to let them take two plant species, but she sharply refused. She couldn’t waste such an important trump card.

Just then, an idea came to Mitsuha’s mind. She leaned over to one of the elderly academics who seemed to have the most authority and whispered, “Before we get off the helicopter, can you pass me a memo with your personal contact information? Just in case I want to consult you for anything in the future…”

The old man's paper-thin eyes went as wide as saucers.

Th-That was terrifying…

It went without saying that he did exactly as Mitsuha requested.

The Vanelian fleet's relatively long voyage to the colony—though the distance wasn't far for a sailor—was nearing its end.

Sailing ships were slow. They were fast with a strong tailwind, or more accurately with a crosswind, but they inevitably had to deal with some spurs of headwinds. Sometimes there was no wind at all, and sailing in a storm was impossible.

A ship could tack against a headwind by zigzagging back and forth to move faster, but in terms of velocity, sailing was fairly slow. Over the course of a long voyage, the average speed would be around five knots, or about 5.7 miles per hour.

…A snail's pace!

Modern-day warships on Earth could cruise at above twenty knots—twenty-three miles per hour—unless the weather was especially bad. That was about four times faster than a sailing ship. Technically, sailing ships could manage a cruising speed of fifteen knots and a top speed of twenty knots, but that was only possible with the best ship, the best crew, and the best wind, weather, and ocean conditions—and only for a small percentage of the whole voyage.

The long voyage must've felt like an eternity to the sailors who were heading towards the battleground, not knowing if

they'll return alive.

Meanwhile, I can jump there in an instant… Yeah, sorry for my dumb overpowered ability, guys!

Mitsuha was back in the maritime patrol aircraft with the crew. Down below were the two kingdoms' fleets. It took a while after the Vanelian fleet arrived before both sides spotted each other.

Naval battles of this era were marathons, and it wasn't unusual for one to last for days. The fleets would spend a lot of time circling around for a superior position or to chase a fleeing ship.

The aircraft didn't have any torpedoes, missiles, or anti-submarine depth charges. Its hardpoints on the fuselage were equipped with camera pods. The cameras had night vision functionality, so they'd have no trouble observing the fleets after dark. A second aircraft and crew were on standby at the base on Earth in case the battle dragged out.

It occurred to Mitsuha that she could replenish the aircraft by jumping fuel directly into the tank from the base, but when she suggested the idea, the crew went pale and strongly opposed it. If she miscalculated the jumping point, she could spawn the fuel in midair, causing the engine to go up in flames. She could also drop the fuel into the cockpit or elsewhere inside the aircraft.

Fair enough…

In any event, thus begins the momentous battle between the opposing fleets!

“**Both fleets are underway,**” Mitsuha heard through her ICS headset. It was the pilot’s voice.

The TACCO had superiority over the pilot and was serving as the captain of the aircraft. Mitsuha wondered if the navy organized the crew that way because they thought tactical decision-making would be important on this flight. In reality, neither the TACCO nor the pilot would have much to do; the aircraft wasn’t going to interfere with the battle, and was only going to hover and keep watch according to Mitsuha’s orders.

“Roger. Maintain altitude and continue to monitor!” she replied.

The crew’s job for the day was to simply coast high above. The sailors wouldn’t be able to hear the engine from below, and if they happened to look up, they’d assume the floating object was a bird or something. A lower altitude would’ve worked too—no one was going to stare off at the sky or be able to hear the faint sound of the engine during cannon fire—but a higher altitude increased the range of vision.

Mitsuha knew nothing of the politics or strategy behind this naval battle. All she knew was that both sides were fully expecting to charge. She’d divulged the situation to the nation lending the aircrafts, “A country declared war on an ally of my kingdom. If it looks like our ally is about to lose, my country will

give the smallest bit of military aid and demonstrate what ‘the kingdom blessed by the Goddess’ can really do.”

It would’ve been pointless to hide her plan from the aircraft crew and the scholars; they were going to see everything anyway and she was already using the “Goddess’s power” to jump them back and forth between worlds without reserve. They were beside themselves to see how the Goddess’s power would be used in battle.

There are still many people on modern-day Earth who seriously believe in the existence of gods… At least enough to use God’s name to justify killing others.

Unfortunately for these guys, they might be disappointed by what they see if my fleet does end up joining the battle. This deus ex machina *I’m planning is a little…inelegant.*

The battle didn’t actually start for a while. It took forever for the ships to maneuver into firing position. Even now, there were plenty of ships that weren’t situated in place, and the line of battle on both sides was scattershot. Both fleets had split into multiple rows that were wading around in a jumbled mess.

Are the commanders incompetent, or is this just how it goes? I guess you can’t expect sailing ships to be as easy to steer as motor-driven ones. Maybe forming one long line is too difficult? Or maybe they’re not even forming a line for a volley fire in the first place?

Are their warships, which have sixty-four cannons at best, a little too weak for the line of battle tactic? Has this world not yet

arrived at the stage to employ such a strategy? Eh, I guess there's no guarantee that both ship technology and military strategy are following a course parallel to Earth's. The naval officers I've spoken to made it sound like it was, though.

It was a very windy day (specifically at sea level; it was calmer at the aircraft's altitude). The ships had folded some of their sails to avoid getting bobbed around.

Sweet, my emergency operation might actually work. I made sure to study up beforehand. It'd be silly not to take advantage of the extensive knowledge available to me on Earth! I read a book about all the naval tactics used during the Age of Sail.

Muahaha, it's over, Noral! I have the high gr—I mean, upwind!

…What am I, a Jedi?!

I'm sure these naval officers know about the advantage of being upwind too, but I have a special move they won't be able to counter—oh no, the volley started while I was distracted with my thoughts. Both sides are already taking damage!

Sailing ships couldn't aim very well, so they were firing upon each other from a very short distance of about two to three hundred yards. It'd be impressive if they *didn't* hit each other from that distance. It was much easier than calculating the trajectory of a projectile and lobbing from ten or fifteen miles away.

None of the ships had sunk; the cannonballs weren't packed with explosives, and it took much more than a little damage to the upper deck to sink a wooden ship. The main objectives of

sailing ship warfare were to rob the enemy ships of their navigational capabilities by destroying the mast and maiming crew members with the collapsing wooden fragments, and then boarding their ships to engage in hand-to-hand combat. The latter was more common in one-on-one ship battles; approaching an enemy ship in this riot would've been impossible.

With the lack of explosions, flames, or smoke, it was difficult to tell if there was any volley from such a high altitude, but there were probably a lot of casualties already. Among them would be officers Mitsuha had met at parties in the capital, officers who chatted with her at the bar in the port town, and possibly even the soldier boy.

It didn't matter where a person worked on the ship, or how high or low they were in its chain of command. Death came for all just the same.

The crew members of the patrol craft were on a plane now, but they were naval personnel. They had a great interest in ships and naval artillery, and couldn't help but spectate through the windows as they did their job—even though they couldn't make much out from this height.

Most of the windows bulge out like fisheye lenses, so you can get a view of what's below. But we really are way too high up to actually see anything…

A considerable amount of time had passed since the bombardment started.

Both sides had around thirty ships. This was clearly just a skirmish; a true decisive battle where the fate of their countries was at stake would've featured over one hundred ships on each side.

Well, it's possible I only feel that way because my knowledge of naval battles on Earth is coloring my perception. Sixty total ships might be a lot for a naval battle for countries in this era of civilization… Especially to the people in the thick of the turmoil.

"**Your ally nation is in an inferior position. Three of their five squadrons have taken significant damage,**" the ordnanceman said as he studied the battle through his binoculars.

The Kingdom of Vanel—which the aircraft crew knew as "the ally nation"—had formed five rows of six ships. The tactic was akin to what was known on Earth as the line of battle, albeit a pretty disorganized one. Each row was acting independently from the rest, and was led by a squadron leader trying to gain a superior position on the enemy.

The Kingdom of Noral, on the other hand, had formed eight rows of four ships. They had thirty-two ships, which was two more than Vanel. The lack of vessel mobility and wireless communication probably limited the number of ships that could act in unison. The flag signals on your squadron's commanding ships were only visible from so far away.

Furthermore, the ships in each fleet varied in size and strength. Vanel's fleet ranged from the newest sixty-four-cannon

warships to the slightly older forty-cannons. They'd grouped their squadrons according to size; sailing ships couldn't synchronize unless they shared the same speed, turning radius, attack and defense capabilities, and more.

The number of ships was far from the main factor that determined who had the advantage.

"**Your allies made a costly mistake…**" the ordnanceman pointed out.

…And he was right. It was a commonly held belief that windward vessels had the advantage in battle between sailing ships. However, this was only true in regard to approaching the enemy. Not in engaging the enemy. That advantage was also lost entirely when it was very windy, as it was today.

A ship advancing with the wind in its sails heeled leeward—the stronger the wind, the steeper the heel angle. This resulted in the lowest gun deck on that side dipping below the waterline. The gunports couldn't be opened, massively reducing the number of usable cannons. Even the cannons in the upper decks pointed downward, thus narrowing their firing range.

As a result, the Vanelian fleet, which believed that approaching leeward was for cowards who intended to flee, took a huge blow to its own offensive capabilities. But that wasn't all…

"Noral reduced the number of ships per squadrons to four to prioritize maneuverability and to target Vanel's rear ships," Mitsuha observed.

That was clever; cannons were only positioned on the sides of a ship and weren't very mobile, so the ships at the front of Vanel's fleet wouldn't be able to support the ships in the back. They'd have to turn around, which would be very risky under these circumstances. Both fleets were small, but the Noralian fleet and its eight squadrons wasn't going to miss such a glaring weakness.

"**Looks like it's over for them…**" concluded the ordnanceman, who was looking through a large camera instead of binoculars. They were recording the battle with the mounted camera at the bottom of the aircraft too, but apparently it wasn't a good enough view for them.

Meanwhile, Mitsuha was preparing for her next move. "It's time for my country's fleet to intervene! Bye for now!" She'd already briefed them on what her intervention would entail, so the aircraft was going to stay in the sky and wait for her.

Okay! Jump!

Mitsuha appeared in the room she was renting at the Wolf Fang base. She grabbed a megaphone with a shoulder strap and…

Jump!

…landed in the crow's nest of a sailing ship.

"**All hands, prepare to attack!**" Mitsuha yelled through her megaphone. She was on the main ship in the center of Zegleus's three-ship squadron. She'd first jumped above the vessels to confirm the location of her landing spot, then made consecutive jumps to appear on the crow's nest. The three vessels were afloat

close together. The megaphone speaker should've been loud enough for the other ships' crews to hear, but she directed them to raise flag signals just in case.

"YEEEAAAHHH!" came a thunderous roar from all three ships.

I guess they can hear me fine. But the flag signals still gotta go up. We're not skipping any steps.

The three ships that were captured off the shores of Bozes County had become Zegleusian ships under new names, but for this day alone, they were reunited under their old nationality and names.

Reunited and it feels so good… Oh, shut up!

"**All ships, prepare to fire from both sides! Our target is the Noralian fleet! Vanelian Expedition Fleet, full speed ahead!**"

Well, there's no point in saying "full speed ahead" when there are no propellers… And the ships are already going pretty fast… But whatever! Gotta hype up the team!

Okay, jump!

"The *Nady* is falling out of the line! It seems to be having trouble maneuvering!"

"Damn it!"

Vice Admiral Melberk, the Vanelian fleet commander, looked agitated. He was on the stern of the sixty-four-cannon *Atirelle,* the flagship of the First Squadron.

Warships didn’t sink easily. If defeat was inevitable, all you had to do was retreat. Fortunately, the direction they’d need to flee was leeward and their sails were hardly damaged. It wouldn’t be easy for the enemy to seize them. That meant the Vanelian fleet could retreat now and have little chance of being captured and taken prisoner. There was nothing to worry about…

…except for one thing. The fleet commander would be the one to take full blame for the defeat, the surrender of the colony, and the pitiful retreat. That would mean the end of his career as a military man. But Vice Admiral Melberk couldn’t allow his men and ships to be lost for such a trivial reason. Bravery didn’t always mean charging recklessly at the enemy.

“There’s no choice. Order all ships to retrea—”

“Impact on the waters! The shots landed in front of one of the enemy ships!”

“What?”

Firing cannons between warships were brute force affairs staged only two to three hundred yards apart. So aside from a few missed shots, no cannonball should ever fall short of the target. Even stranger, every ship in the squadron had just volleyed, which meant none should’ve been ready to fire again so quickly.

Then where did those shots come from?

“Three ships are approaching from the starboard side!” a lookout hollered. “They’re forty-cannons! They’re…Vanelian… ships? Huh…?”

“They must’ve lost half their force. Which squadron is it?!” the fleet commander yelled back, assuming the three ships belonged to one of their squadrons of six.

“One of them is the forty-cannon *Kalliad*! It’s the expedition fleet that set sail last year in search of new lands!” answered the lookout.

“Wh-Whaaaat?!”

Expedition fleet. While that sounded like a lucrative opportunity, it was essentially one massive gamble with a very low survival rate. This particular expedition fleet was entrusted to an unsavory slave trader who had curried favor in political and business circles. The fleet consisted of three outdated ships that were on the brink of decommission, and its crew was made up of outcasts, washouts, delinquents, and a few social pariahs who were undesired in the political world. It was the tragic fleet about which everyone believed, “They must be long dead by now,” yet nobody dared to say it out loud.

“How in the…” Melberk gasped.

“More shots fired! This time, multiple hits!” the lookout yelled.

There were three ships with forty cannons, twenty on each side. Assuming that the other two ships fired their rounds after seeing the first ship’s attempt, that’d be forty shots total. It wasn’t surprising that some of them landed, even if they were high-angled shots. The fleet wasn’t too far from the enemy.

Their cannonballs were just hunks of iron—nothing a giant warship couldn't handle from a long distance. They weren't packed with explosives. You'd need to be much closer to the enemy if you wanted to do serious damage.

The commander's mind was not occupied with the three ships' bombardment or its accuracy, but instead with the question of how and why they were here.

"But three cowardly ships wasting their shots from far away won't change anyth—"

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Huh?" The fleet commander gaped as cannon fire echoed. He couldn't believe what he saw.

The commander's squadron had positioned itself on the windward side, and the enemy squadron was on the leeward side. They had an advantage of six ships to four, but the three ships at the rear had been ravaged by another enemy squadron that had just been firing broadside. To make matters worse, every ship in the squadron was heeling leeward, putting their lowest gun decks awash and rendering their upper deck cannons unusable because they were pointing too low. This put them at a fatal disadvantage in firing capability.

But now, somehow, there was this one antiquated ship between the commander's squadron and the enemy squadron, and it was unbelievably close to the enemy squadron's flagship.

"I-Impossible! That wasn't there a moment ago. I know it wasn't!"

Despite the commander's words, the old ship was very much there. It fired broadside on the lead enemy ship…and disappeared.

Silence fell upon the stern of the flagship. No one could utter a word after what they'd just witnessed.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Huh…" The Vanelian crew was aghast.

The old expedition ship appeared again, this time on the leeward side of the enemy squadron's flagship, and fired a second round from the opposite side of the one they'd just used. The cannons were fully loaded and faced windward, which meant its lowest gun deck was above water and all its weapons were usable.

The mysterious newcomer—which seemed to be an ally—couldn't use its lower cannons during the first strike, and its upper cannons were pointed slightly downward due to the ship's inclined angle. The enemy squadron was slanted leeward, exposing part of the hull that was normally below the waterline. That meant the ally ship had to aim for what it could with its downward-facing cannons: the hull at point-blank range.

It could've aimed for the enemy's gunports to handicap its firing power, but instead elected to fatally damage the hull by bombarding it below the waterline, thus putting it at risk of flooding and sinking. The mysterious ally's twenty cannonballs narrowly grazed the water, some bouncing against the sea before they pierced through the hull.

The ship then swiftly veered around to launching a second attack on its other side. This time, it was able to use both the upper and the lower gun deck. The broadside cannons were now pointing upward, so the waterline was out of sight. The enemy ship was heeling into the ally ship, exposing the deck. The ally's aim was just that; they blasted their cannons, smashing the mast, cutting the ropes, tearing the sails, and mortally wounding the sailors on deck.

The ally ship's goal was to immobilize the enemy, and it looked like the Noralian ship was, indeed, suffering massive ruptures on the hull. If it lost sailing capabilities, or if it ended up veering to the wrong side of the wind and swaying to an upright angle…

The Vanelian squadron could clearly see the gaping ruptures along the enemy ships as well as the catastrophic damage to its mast and deck.

The ally ship was now attacking the Noralian ship with flaming pots. The crew members were filling pots with oil, tying them with cloth, lighting them on fire, and flinging them onto the enemy's deck. It was easy because the ships were so close to each other.

It didn't take long for the flames to spread. To say the enemy ship had been immobilized would be an understatement. It was only a matter of time before it lost its sails, which would cause the hull to tilt upright again, and the damaged side would dunk into the ocean, allowing sea water to flood in.

“The enemy’s flagship is dropping speed! It’s falling behind the line!” the lookout observed.

The flagship slowing down put the other ships behind at risk of rear-ending it. Sailing ships had no brakes, so they had no choice but to try to dodge it as they advanced. Their sudden veering threw the line into confusion, putting the Vanelian squadron out of their line of fire.

The officers on the stern heard what the lookout said. They just couldn’t process what he meant. Even as they were idling around, the sailors on the gun deck below were likely working at full capacity to reload. *They should be ready to fire the next round right about now*…Just as they thought that…

“Wh?! It’s gone…”

…the mysterious ally ship had vanished again. *Is that the last of the miraculous phenomena?* the Vanelians thought. Not a second later, a different older-model ship appeared. It was heading directly for the second ship in the enemy line, gaining so close that their hulls were nearly touching.

There was no better position to be in for the next thing they were about to do.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

As the ally ship barely brushed the tail of the enemy ship, its cannons went off in sequence, ramming cannonballs into the length of the enemy ship from its stern to its bow. This was the greatest weakness of sailing ships: no defensive bulwarks to prevent shots from piercing through the side.

Pummeling every single cannonball they had into the side of the enemy ship was a positively diabolical thing to do.

“That was ruthless…” swallowed one of the sailors on the stern of the Vanelian fleet’s First Squadron. Everyone else was thinking the same.

“**Next up!**” Mitsuha shouted.

“YES, MA’AM!” rumbled her ship’s crew.

The first vessel that fired, the *Kalliad,* was currently reloading. The second vessel had been training specifically for attacking from the rear, so they were on standby after the first fire. Needless to mention both were already reloading the side they just used. Meanwhile, Mitsuha was about to use the third ship to attack the same way as the first. The enemy squadron they’d just struck was probably no longer a threat, so she was eyeing a different target.

They were able to destroy any ship with one hit to the stern, but while that tore up the interior, it left the hull and masts mostly intact. The enemy’s ships were still repairable when they returned to their homeland.

It probably causes more casualties too. Not exactly what I’m going for. And not my main objective for this trip either, Mitsuha thought.

This strategy wouldn’t be possible without her powers anyway, so it wasn’t like the experience would come in handy for the crew members. The initial attack was just an experiment to

see if it was possible at all. She wasn't planning to ever do it again. Mitsuha decided to give the third ship a normal firing practice like the other two.

Not that jumping directly next to an enemy ship and firing at point-blank range is normal…

I don't think there's any way they could get that close to an enemy ship without me. But maybe the experience will be valuable for uh…something. I'll let them practice long-range bombardment too if we get a big enough upper hand.

Jump!

"What the hell just happened…" muttered Vice Admiral Melberk.

In a sequence of inexplicable events, the lead and second ship of the enemy's four-ship squadron were instantly incapacitated, ending up with two barely damaged and two severely impaired ships. The Vanelian First Squadron, meanwhile, had three slightly damaged and three moderately damaged ships. Noral's squadron no longer stood a chance. Their crew was likely stupefied by what they just witnessed, allowing the Vanelian ships to fire on them unchallenged before they finally turned around and fled. They were currently coasting in the distance.

In the end, three of the four enemy ships suffered heavy damage but not enough to sink. The flagship had come to a near halt, steadily losing buoyancy as water surged in through the punctured lower hull. Chasing them down would've been easy

for the Vanelian First Squadron, but battered ships were slow and easy to catch up to. Attacking the remaining undamaged warships was more urgent.

As such, the First Squadron ignored the incapacitated enemy squadron and began to maneuver toward a different one. In the brief period it took to compose themselves, the commander voiced the doubts that were nagging at him.

“That expedition fleet… How could they have been here? I remember the crew being filled out with incompetent—er, unskilled duds—I mean, men who were not quite capable or brave enough to make it as sailors. So how in the—”

“*That’s* what you’re worried about, sir?” one of his subordinates interrupted. “I think the bigger issue here is the phenomenon we just witnessed. How did those ships appear directly before the enemy and vanish just as quickly? That sounds just like…”

Warships that disappeared into thin air. Every man on the stern had heard a similar tale. And relatively recently, too.

“The miracle of…the Goddess,” the commander said under his breath.

This incident reminded them all of the modern myth of the *Aeras,* the warship chosen and taken in by the Goddess.

“The enemy ship is at 1300 yards!”

Everyone on the stern snapped back to the present at the lookout’s call. The moment of calm was over.

“We’re assisting the Third Squadron!” the commander thundered. “Hard to port at five hundred yards and engage the opponent! Prepare the starboard cannons!”

The Noralian squadrons had only four ships each, but their eight squadrons outnumbered Vanel’s six. The Vanelian squadrons could put up a good fight one-on-one even with the disadvantage of being upwind, but they stood no chance one-against-two. Many of their ships had already taken too much damage to continue fighting. With that said, if the First Squadron joined another battle, making it two squadrons against two—which would be twelve ships to eight—they might be able to turn the tide.

“Fire!”

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The disarrayed drumming of cannon fire echoed from the ship’s broadside.

While the First Squadron approached a line of enemy ships from the side to assist the Third Squadron, the Fifth Squadron was taking on two Noralian squadrons by itself. Not only was it in an inferior position, but it was also outnumbered eight ships to six, putting it at an overwhelming disadvantage. The ships were firing broadside on the enemy gun decks to maim their arms, but while some shots hit the target, they were a long way from incapacitating any of the Noralian ships. The Vanelians were much closer to being decimated.

That was hardly surprising. The Third Squadron's two ships in the lead were up against two enemy ships each, and the other four were being hounded by one each. On top of that, the Vanelian fleet couldn't use their lowest leeward gun decks. If the squadron had somehow managed to gain an upper hand under those circumstances, that squadron commander deserved a medal.

"Damn it! We're stretched too thin! Where's the fleet flagship…" cursed the commander of the Fifth Squadron. His mind was occupied with only one question: when would the fleet flagship—which was also the First Squadron flagship that carried the fleet commander—raise the flags for a retreat? He hoped dearly it'd be before his own ships were wiped out.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

"What the…"

The rapid firing came from an unidentified ship that seemingly appeared out of thin air. Actually, the commander recognized it; it was a slightly older Vanelian model, and it was flying their kingdom's flag.

The same spectacle as what the First Squadron saw unfolded before the Fifth. The only difference was that the second ship attacked from the side instead of the rear. The enemy squadron's lead and second ship were disabled in the blink of an eye. And with that, the mysterious fleet of three disappeared…

A lengthy silence took over the Fifth Squadron. The crew members were dumbstruck for a while before they all returned

to their senses.

“We have the Goddess’s protection! FIRE!” the commander finally charged.

“YEAAHH!” his crew revved.

The commander knew the gun deck was still reloading; he only yelled “fire” because he was too excited not to. But their foe was clearly distraught and this sudden event had given the Fifth Squadron momentum—and this time, with the belief that they, too, had the protection of the Goddess.

“…Victory is ours now!” The commander’s mouth twisted into a vicious grin.

“**The first ship you attacked is starting to sink. The crew is currently evacuating!**”

“Copy that!”

Sweet, I was waiting for this moment! Mitsuha thought. She’d asked the crew of the aircraft to notify her when the passengers of any sinking ships began to evacuate.

…What’s that? Didn’t I say, “sailing ships rarely sink”? That’s only for normal warfare. If a sailing ship gets holes blown through its hull below the waterline at point-blank from one side and then gets torched by flaming pots on the other, it’s probably gonna sink. There’s not much the crew can do at that point.

Also, for any ships that didn’t sink from the cannonballs, I just grabbed a hunk of the hull and jumped them away. As for why I wanted to be notified when the ships are about to sink…

“Jump!”

…it’s so I can loot them, of course.

Cannons, gunpowder, cannonballs… Zegleus still had a long way before they were able to manufacture their own cannons so she wanted to stock up. She also wanted to replace the cannons on her new vessels as well as the ones on the captured ships, which were past their barrel life. The spare gunpowder and ammunition would come in handy too.

She was also more than happy to grab the ship rigging, maintenance tools, the muskets along with their gunpowder and bullets, the safes, the preserved foods, and other prizes. Some of the gunpowder in the lower decks had likely gotten wet and ruined, but there was nothing she could do about that.

Mitsuha was waiting until just before the ships sank because she didn’t want the crew on board to witness the “vanishing equipment phenomenon.” It was better to wait until after they evacuated.

Taking entire ships wasn’t an option. She didn’t want the Noralian fleet to think they lost because the Goddess intervened. It had to appear as if the Vanelians won fair and square. There was no helping the Vanelians thinking that the Goddess lent them a hand, but technically, the reinforcements who came to assist and sink the enemy was one of their own, and the number of ships they sank this time was just a tad more than normal.

…I know that’s a bit of a stretch, but it is *the Vanelian weapons that’s vanquishing these ships. No one can say the Goddess did it*

herself.

If all goes well, the Vanelians might slack off on their military expansion…since they have the Goddess's protection. They might think, "Why waste money on military expenses if the Goddess will save us anyway?"

The Noralian ships will probably report that they were defeated by "enemy ships that appeared out of nowhere and fired from an extremely close range." Their leaders back home would interpret that as the Noralian ships having been so distracted by the enemy in front of them that no one noticed another fleet approaching and striking from a different angle, while veering so sharply that they risked collision as they passed by. No one will actually believe that ships could materialize out of nowhere, and if the Noralian navy insists that is exactly what happened, people will just assume they're just making excuses to avoid consequences.

Perfectamundo! Let's keep this up!

Mitsuha continued jumping each freshly reloaded ship and snuggling up right beside the next target. *Fire broadside!* She needed to flush the sailors out of the busted vessels first before she could pocket the contents.

No rest for the wicked!

"That's probably good enough…"

Mitsuha and her crew devastated one Noralian squadron flagship after another, occasionally taking down some second lead ships along the way. Most were now sinking or already

completely submerged, stripped clean of their ammunition, materials, food, and safes. They were scrapped junk at this point.

Any more sunken ships and the whole incident would seem too suspicious. Mitsuha didn't want to go overboard, so she concluded that that was enough interference for now. The Vanelians would have to manage the rest on their own.

The *Leviathan,* which was the flagship of the Third Squadron, was doing fine. It wasn't completely unscathed, though. Mitsuha didn't know if the soldier boy was okay or not.

I can't do anything reckless like save his life, as much as I'd like to. I'm not Mitsuha, the soldier boy's friend, right now; I'm Viscountess Mitsuha von Yamano, a noblewoman from the Kingdom of Zegleus.

"**All right, guys! We're gonna spend the rest of the battle practicing long-range volleying! We'll keep going until we're out of ammo!**" Mitsuha said through her megaphone.

Her fleet spent the next hour practicing long-range cannon fire that required calculating the angle of trajectory. They didn't shoot from too far away, a mile at most. The cannons' maximum range was more than that but it would've been pointless to hurl ammo that barely scratched their target. She wanted to remain within effective range.



Rock fights from two to three hundred yards seem to be the norm in this world. If my fleet didn't have my world-jumping ability to pull off the hit-and-run trick, we'd get devastated too. I ain't risking no harm to my precious ships and crew, so I'm gonna pass on that. I'll just have them attack from far away as practice for when our new cannons are finished.

And this turned out to be a perfect field trip for the novice sailors. They could learn a thing or two from watching the merciless brawls between the two fleets…while the former prisoners-turned-drill sergeants smack them up from behind.

Mitsuha ended up acquiring a wealth of cannonballs, gunpowder, and replacement cannons. She didn't even mind if the three ships exhausted all their current ammunition. They wouldn't need it once the new cannons were manufactured.

If only I knew when those cannons will be ready for mass production…

After several rounds of cannon fire practice, it was time to retreat. The three ships in the mystery fleet remained untouched; the Noralian ships were way too busy with the Vanelians to bother firing back at the cowardly opponents that were attacking from afar with horrible accuracy. Even when their shots did hit the mark, they barely did any damage.

That's fine with me. We're just practicing for when we get our rifled cannons. Those are gonna fire explosive shells from outside

the enemy's firing range. So go ahead and laugh while you can. You'll regret it later...

Mitsuha couldn't afford to let Vanel lose this battle. If they did, the next action they'd take would be to strengthen their navy by building new ships. The older ships would then be taken off the front lines and leased to merchants as expedition ships to search for new lands. Vanel would definitely want to replace the colony they ceded.

The Vanelian government might drop all pretenses and try to force Mitsuha to give up her money and goods, and then seek out her home country and steal its riches and technology to combat Vanel's economic woes.

After all the effort I made to fit in with Vanel, moving to Noral and doing it all over again would be a massive pain. I wouldn't have Micchan or the soldier boy there either...

Much time had passed since the start of the battle. The sun had set and the sky was growing dim.

The fight ended in victory for Vanel. Despite starting off with a big advantage, there was no way Noral could've won after having every squadron's flagship destroyed and even ending up with some second ships heavily damaged. The Noralian fleet was slowly withdrawing, and the Vanelian fleet was working to secure the ships that had surrendered.

It was almost completely dark. The ships that hadn't been captured already would likely get away, except for the ones that

had lost navigational ability. For every captured ship, a reward relative to its worth was going to be distributed to that fleet's crew members. The Vanelians were eager to seize as many as they could.

A similar system existed on Earth. The reward was usually given not just to the ship that executed the capture, but also the ships that were within visible range. That only made sense—if multiple ships gave chase and one of them stopped the enemy warship by circling around them but then a different ship boarded it first and took the entire reward, that would definitely start a fight.

Every crew member typically received a pretty substantial amount of the reward, too; one eighth went to the commanders, three eighths to the captains, one eighth to the officers, one eighth to the warrant and petty officers, and the final two eighths to the rest. Warships were that valuable.

Imagine being an officer on a ship that was this close to seizing an enemy vessel—with no allies in sight to assist—only for the enemy ship's final shot before its surrender to directly hit your ship's stern, taking out all the other officers and leaving the entire eighth of the reward to you. That would be a dream scenario… Uh, wait. I take that back. Watching your fellow officers get turned to mincemeat before your eyes would be a nightmare.

If that happened to me, I'd give my entire share to the bereaved families—hold on, what am I thinking? Any dead sailors' share probably went to their families anyway. That's a rule I would

implement if I were a country's leader! Plus, there's also no way all the officers on a ship would be congregating in one spot during a battle.

Oh, it's almost nightfall. Time to go.

Mitsuha hit the switch on her wireless transceiver.

"**Drop the flares in two minutes! Don't wait for my order!**" she said.

"**Copy that!**" someone on the aircraft responded.

Okay, I shouldn't need to contact them again.

Jump!

"It's time! Are you ready?" Mitsuha called out.

"Yes, ma'am!" three maids answered.

Mitsuha had picked three women from the Yamano Mature Maids to play the roles of ship spirits. The three vessels from the expedition fleet were all old, so the Munchkin Maids wouldn't have fit the profile. Asking elderly women to do the job was risky, so she chose from the younger adults, going with the idea that ship spirits stopped aging once they reached young adulthood.

She had quite a pool of candidates to choose from because she offered a bonus salary, and a pretty hefty one at that. This mission wouldn't be without danger, but the maids themselves seemed to think they would be perfectly safe. However, if a misfired cannonball happened to blow up Mitsuha, they would be deserted on unknown land. *Remember Lieutenant Colonel Hirose…*

There was no reason to worry this time, though. Mitsuha had pointed out the risks (like slipping off the crow's nest) to them beforehand. Besides, the three ladies had played the role of ship spirits in the past.

She was going to jump one maid to each of the three ships' crow's nests. She made sure the lookouts had already climbed down to make room.

Okay, triple jump! Wahoo!

Mitsuha dropped off the women on the crow's nests. Shortly afterward, the aircraft that was idling overhead dropped a flare, just like when she rescued the *Aeras.* The intense ball of light parachuted steadily as it illuminated the silhouettes of the three ships and the female figures perched above.

The distance and the backlight made it hard to see the maids' faces, but the sailors would convince themselves they were women of unrivaled beauty. *I mean, I* did *choose the cute-looking maids to be safe.*

The former expedition fleet was sailing past the Vanelian fleet's flagship. Mitsuha spotted it by checking for the admiral and commander flags on the sails, and jumped her three ships close to it to ensure that the ladies' silhouettes would be clearly seen. Everyone who'd report to their headquarters in Vanel would be a witness.

“Commander!” the lookout yelled. “The *Kalliad*—the flagship of the expedition fleet—is flashing a signal! It reads, ‘TAKE CARE OF OUR FAMILIES. GLORY TO VANEL…’”

“What? Are they not sailing home with us?” The fleet commander was perplexed by the message.

“All three ships are now flashing signals! They’re all the same message: ‘FAREWELL.’ That’s it. They’re repeating ‘FAREWELL’ to us!”

The men on the stern listened to the lookout’s sighting as they watched the flickering lights in silence. Soldiers watched from the deck too, and those at the gun decks below were leaning out of the gun ports. The three women waved from the crow’s nests until…

“They…disappeared…”

“Does this mean that the ships and their crews had already died and joined the Goddess in heaven? Have they come to assist us because they couldn’t bear to watch their homeland struggle so pitifully? Out of loyalty to their kingdom…even though they were forced to go on a reckless voyage that didn’t guarantee their return home?”

“Hooray for the Vanelian navy!”

“Hooray for the expedition fleet!”

Cheers hollered from every ship in the Vanelian fleet. In the midst of all the whooping, however, the men on the flagship’s stern stood still with tears streaming down their faces…

Afterward, the fleet commander suggested that they share the rewards for the captured vessels with the crew of the three expedition ships, and that the money should go to their families. Nearly every sailor in the fleet agreed.

Not a single person noticed that the fleet commander was the only person who would receive the same portion of the reward no matter how many ships got to share it…

Chapter 81:
After the Battle

Mitsuha made the crew members of the three ships swear to silence. “Talking about the miracles of the Goddess is imprudent. Keep what you witnessed to yourselves,” she convinced them. Word of this incident spreading could’ve led to terrible consequences.

…Mainly for me. There’s also a chance the Vanelian army and the government could get foolhardy, believing their kingdom to be invincible because they have the Goddess’s protection. That could be disastrous.

And I especially don’t want them *to learn of what I did. Not after I led them on to believe that Traversal expends life force…*

“MITSUHA! COME OUT RIGHT THIS SECOND, YOUNG LADY!”

Yeesh, Count Bozes is losing it, shuddered Mitsuha.

When she told Count Bozes that she might be accompanying the fleet in combat, he demanded he travel with them. She didn’t want him to see how liberally she used her world-jumping ability, though, so when it came time to leave, she downplayed things by saying, “They’re just going out to sea for a little squadron training.” The ships were going to be captained by Zegleusian naval officers and manned by Zegleusian sailors, or so she claimed. The truth was that there were a few special guests among the crew—former Vanelian sailors who’d act as drill

sergeants to motivate them. Their presence was strictly meant for training purposes, of course.

And it was just a coincidence that we ran into trouble during training and decided to respond.

In short, Mitsuha was forced to make a judgment call on the spot and jumped the fleet closer for emergency deployment.

It was a force majeure! You understand, don't you?

Mitsuha had given the captain of the *Kalliad* a letter explaining so and had him deliver it to Count Bozes, who was clearly not convinced. The count summoned his horse to make the hours-long trip to her residency, and here he was giving her a piece of his mind. His yelling was heard from outside the entrance while the maids froze up in terror behind the door.

…Yeah, he's pissed with a capital P. At least he started making his racket outside. It gives me some time to react!

"Anton, the count's all yours! You've got this!" Mitsuha said.

"Huh? What do you mean, my lady? N-No, you can't be serious…"

I forbade the fleet crew from revealing details about our top-secret mission or speaking of the Goddess's miracles, so I don't have to worry about the count hearing anything from them. I even hinted that divine punishment would await if they disobeyed me…

I didn't wanna be too hard on them, though, so I told them they can talk about the location of the battle and our victory. I'm sure they're dying to brag, and they'll have to provide some kind of report to get paid. Their superiors need to know about their

training progress too. I just don't want them talking about the supernatural "Goddess Strategy."

A few details are bound to leak but whatever. As long as it's not recorded in the official report.

"Sorry, Anton! I've gotta scram! Emergency retreat!"

"No, wait! P-Please, d-don't go…"

…Okay, jump!

Naturally, running away did nothing to solve the problem. Mitsuha returned home later that evening and popped into Beatrice's bedroom, figuring the count might've calmed down by then, but she was immediately cornered by him and Lady Iris who were lying in wait. They gave her hell.

Mitsuha didn't even realize Lady Iris was present; she didn't hear her earlier at the entrance.

What's that? She was so mad that she couldn't even manage to utter a word?

Haha, I see…

"Whaaaaat?!"

A wail echoed through the royal conference room. The king of Vanel and his cabinet ministers had just received a message from the captain of a sloop.

The sloop captain was delivering a digest report of the Vanelian fleet's great victory. The fleet had dispatched his high-speed sailing ship to carry the word and as soon as it arrived in

the harbor, he jumped on a horse and bolted for the capital. His ship was left in his co-captain's hands.

The sloop was far away from the brutal combat scene and was left undamaged. It was a small vessel only meant for communication; its weaponry was limited, but its speed was exceptional. It was closer to a corvette than a frigate.

The sloop's distance from the scene, however, meant that its captain and his crew couldn't get a good view of the miracles of the Goddess and the incredible comeback they made thanks to the expedition fleet. It was only after the battle that the captain was able to row a dinghy to the flagship where he was given the summary to relay to the royal palace. The officers in the CIC told him about the miracle as well as the summary.

The fleet commander himself would give the detailed report at a later date. He and the rest of the officers were currently racing home on six of the least impaired ships. The rest of the fleet would take their time towing their busted ships and captured prizes back to harbor.

The sailors on the six ships were elated; they were guaranteed to be the center of attention at the bars back home, getting treated to free drinks, and receiving a sizable reward for the captured ships. That wasn't all—the account they were about to tell was practically an epic hero's tale. How they devastated the enemy with the help of the long-lost expedition fleet, which had been embraced by the Goddess and became divine soldiers… The ladies would be all over them.

Vice Admiral Melberk was over the moon as well. The Goddess had aided his fleet, which meant he and his crew were her chosen ones. And he had the honor of delivering this news to the king in front of a large crowd. There was no commander alive who'd give up that role to another.

The sloop's only job was to set the king's and the people's minds at ease as soon as possible with a message highlighting the glorious victory, the overall damages and gains, and the assurance that Vanel had the protection of the Goddess. A report of defeat would've been much longer. Planning the next move after a loss relied on the accuracy, details, and speed of said report. There was no such urgency after a victory.

The sloop captain's summary, however, was so far-fetched and unexpected that you'd question his sanity. But if what he said was true, Vanel's future was bright indeed…

The king brooded over the written report in his hand.

This phenomenon wasn't without precedent; the miracle of the *Aeras* happened very recently. But for that case, the Goddess merely lent them a hand out of compassion wishing to save a ship and its crew. It was unthinkable that she'd show enough interest in a squabble between pitiful humans to intervene, let alone help one side win. "A whim of mercy." That was the conclusion that the clergymen came up with after much debate regarding the *Aeras* incident.

Therefore, there was no problem with Vanel continuing to strengthen their military and using it to impose their plans for

foreign diplomacy.

The navy even argued that the Goddess must've endorsed its existence and role. After all, the lives and ships she saved belonged to an institution specifically made for combat and invasion. The clergymen had no choice but to agree with this claim.

The *Aeras*, however, wasn't engaged in battle with other humans; it was stranded after enduring a violent storm. That wasn't the case this time. This miracle occurred during a war—an act fueled by man's will to murder one another. The heavenly goddess loved all and it should've pained her to see her children fight amongst themselves.

So why did she intervene? Did she think justice was on Vanel's side?

Did the Goddess *favor* Vanel? Would she protect Vanel no matter what?

"…Whe-heh."

An eerie wheeze escaped the king's lips, but no one laughed or gave him a funny look. The reason for that was simple: everyone else in the conference room was smirking just like him. A few were even letting out the same unnerving heave. They all followed the same line of thought as the king and reached the conclusion…

"Glory to Vanel is guaranteed!"

"Hooray for Vanel!"

“Hooray for the Royal Navy!”

“Hooray for the Goddess!”

Citizens across the capital cheered as the fleet commander and his officers drove in from the harbor. They were on their way to deliver the full report to the king. The official announcement hadn’t even been made, yet the sloop captain’s headlines, “The Vanelian Navy’s Great Victory” and “The Miracle of the Goddess” had already spread throughout the city. It was currently being relayed across the entire country, after which it would likely circulate through the neighboring countries and the rest of the continent.

“Whe-hee.”

“Whe-hee-hee.”

The fleet commander and the officers in the carriages made no effort to suppress their chortles. And who could blame them? They knew what lied ahead.

Endless praise. Hefty rewards. Important promotions. Significant salary raises.

They were about to become the most popular men in the country and the center of conversation in upper-class parties. They were national heroes who had the supreme protection of the Goddess, after all. No one would dare stand in their way or antagonize them. Nobles, wealthy merchants, and young women would be all over them.

…We’ve won at life!

Anyone in their position would’ve felt the same.

“…Mitsuha, we’re getting flooded with orders from nobles of the navy faction,” said Lephilia. “They want our luxury food, alcohol, and other things… Even some from families on your blacklist are placing orders with us directly. They’re not even trying to buy through a third party or pull any tricks.”

“Uh-oh, looks like they’ve all gotten a bit bold because they think they’re the Goddess’s favorite…” Mitsuha said.

The orders were probably being placed by nobles who served as officers in the fleet. Their families and friends managed to buy them Yamano County goods before they set sail, and now that they were “blessed by the Goddess,” they believed it was a given that Lephilia Trading would acquiesce to their demands.

I highly doubt their families and friends mentioned how they had to debase themselves before Lephilia Trading’s employees—who are commoners—and beg *to purchase my products. “Blessed by the Goddess,” huh? Don’t make me laugh.*

“Refuse them all!” Mitsuha ordered.

“Yes, ma’am!”

Bending your own policies is a quick way to earn a bad reputation. I need to be firm with the rules I set. No exceptions. Giving favorable treatment to certain customers would upset others. Some might demand special treatment too. Stores that allow their regulars to throw their weight around and act like they own the place end up alienating other customers and quickly go

out of business. That's not exactly the same in this case… But whatever!

Also, these men might be treated as heroes in this country, but I'm a foreigner. No one should expect patriotism from me. Lephilia might be criticized for not selling to her country's heroes, but she can use me as an excuse and say, "I have no choice. My supplier could end our contract if I don't comply." They can't argue with that.

But man… They got bold.

I figured some nobles in the navy would react this way, but if the royal palace and the entire country joins in on the sense of entitlement… That could have bad consequences.

Nothing wrong with getting a little excited. It's fine as long as the navy loses strength and stamina, deterring them from sending out expedition fleets. But if this shakes the foundation of the country and makes the government more likely to turn to violence during international disputes, that's another story…

Mitsuha ordered Lephilia to start selling wooden models of the expedition fleet and other Vanelian ships. No merchant worth their salt would pass up such an obvious business opportunity. A navy craze had taken over Vanel, and she wasn't going to miss it.

She had the models assembled in Yamano County. The crow's nest of the expedition fleet ships featured figurines of the ship spirits.

Mitsuha hired a designer in Japan to draw blueprints for the various parts of the models based on digital photos she took, then gave those blueprints to the citizens of her town and villages. It was a perfect side job for people who were unsuited for manual labor but good with their hands. The positions were taken up by women, the elderly, children, and people with injuries and illnesses. They must've been thrilled to find work even they could take on and contribute to the family's finances; they assembled the models incredibly quickly.

The figurines of the ship spirits—the highlight of the model ships—were the only parts that were made in Japan. They were made of resin, but she doubted anyone would notice or care about the material. She considered 3D-printing them next time to save money.

Mitsuha then went on to sell Water Line Series versions and diorama kits depicting scenes from the battle, both of which flew off the shelves. The dioramas were bulky, but a noble would have no trouble finding room to display them in their mansions.

Between the new merch business and the supplies plundered from the sunken ships, no one profited more from this battle than Mitsuha and Lephilia Trading.

War sure is profitable.

...Except for those who actually have to fight, of course.

A few months later, Mitsuha heard that the Royal Navy of Vanel suffered a miserable defeat after recklessly taking on a Noralian

fleet that had half again as many ships, assuming the Goddess would protect them. Many of the Vanelian ships were captured, and the kingdom pretty much lost everything it gained in the previous battle.

Mitsuha didn't interfere because she didn't even know the battle was happening. No one told her about it.

Not that I would've done anything anyway. I got more than enough cannons, ammunition, and materials and tools from the last battle. Assisting one country too much would throw off the balance of power on this continent, anyway.

Besides, Noral was the aggressor last time, but Vanel started the second one. They did this to themselves. The Goddess wouldn't help them in that scenario.

In the end, the crushing defeat in the second battle restored the balance between the two countries' military power. The colony didn't change hands, and both countries ended up expending a lot of ships and people for nothing.

That's war for you…

"…And then! One of the enemy's cannonballs whizzed an inch past my head! But I kept my composure, reloaded my cannon, and took a shot! I got a clean hit on the enemy ship's gun deck—"

The soldier boy was ecstatic.

"Wow! You're so brave!" Mitsuha put her hands to her chin and praised him in wide-eyed amazement.

The soldier boy continued to gush about his exploits.

A good woman knows to listen when a guy wants to boast.

As you can tell, the soldier boy survived the battle. There were victims on his ship who were killed and injured, of course; he just happened to get through without harm. It was just luck.

He was probably feeling down after losing so many crewmates, but the elation from getting to brag about his accomplishments to his female friend was pushing those emotions down for the time being.

That's just how it is, sometimes. I'll bet he's putting on a brave face so I won't see how rattled he is from his near-death experience and how devastated he is about his dead comrades.

He can brag all he wants. I can spend half a day listening to it all. I think he needs it…

"…And that is how the princess interfered in the naval battle," said a high-ranking intelligence officer.

Somewhere on Earth, generals and field officers of a certain country were holding a meeting. They were gathered in front of three large screens in an operation room.

"So if the princess weren't to account for her life force, she could teleport not just between worlds, but from one spot to another in the same world too? While transporting something as large as a sailing ship?" one of the generals asked.

"Yes, sir. Her teleportation-based attacks against the nation she's at war with here on Earth revealed to us that she's able to

transport massive objects between worlds. This naval battle confirms that she's able to do so within the same world."

"Teleportation powers…" Murmurs flurried across the room.

Military personnel had long dreamed of a magic spell or superpower that allowed manipulation of time and space. The same could be said of humanity as a whole. Unfortunately, no human alive was ever able to harness such an art. Whether it be magic, a superhuman skill…or a miraculous power gifted by a god.

"I could only imagine who the rumors are claiming to be the hero of this battle…" the king said.

"Yes, Your Majesty. The rumors on the street are painting Commander Amoros—the true commander of the expedition fleet—as the hero of the battle, followed by the captains, officers, and crews of the three ships."

The king of Vanel was holding a conference in the royal palace with the chancellor, cabinet ministers, and the naval admirals. The king nodded firmly in response to the minister's answer.

"Good. We cannot allow that lowly merchant to take any credit. He was given command of the fleet merely for the sake of formality. It was not him, but the Vanelian soldiers—those who perished in active duty—whose prayers were heard by the Goddess. We can accept this as the truth; it is highly unlikely that merchant would've thought to save his country, and his total lack

of knowledge about warfare means he couldn't have commanded the ships in battle. There is no doubt that it was Commander Amoros and his men who sought the Goddess's aid.

"Continue to release information that would lead the citizens to believe and spread the story as such. Disclose the same thing to the sailors. This way, whatever they discuss in public will benefit our armed forces. These are no rumors, they are truth. You may tell it loud and proud for the Goddess to hear!"

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The conference attendees did not mind this order; in fact, it suited them.

The king continued, "We cannot allow a merchant of ill repute to gain fame. I will not suffer any pestering from his family or his company—which his son had inherited—for rewards, concessions, or a marriage into a high-ranking noble or royal family. That man is nothing more than a merchant who borrowed three warships for a reckless gambit and herded their crews to their deaths. He caused heavy losses for our kingdom. I won't go so far as to call him a criminal, but both the kingdom and the navy regard him with shame.

"His contract—loaning him the ships and crew—ended upon the fleet's demise and his own death. The sailors on board, after their passing, returned to their original posts and became heroic spirits to serve their kingdom once again. It wouldn't make any sense for them to remain under the merchant's command after

death. Their great accomplishments in that battle had nothing to do with him; they acted as soldiers of Vanel and as war heroes.

“I hardly think I need to specify this, but as the merchant was not a soldier, his family gets none of the reward for the captured ships, no condolence money, and no pension for the bereaved. He was just an ordinary citizen who happened to tag along on the fleet’s expedition, correct?” the king asked.

“Of course, Your Majesty!” the conference attendees concurred. There were no objections; they all found that to be the most convenient interpretation of events.

And thus, they successfully prevented a common merchant who planned an excursion from receiving lavish praise, as well as his family and company from profiting off it. The danger of any merchants coming forward to propose exploratory voyages in the future was nipped in the bud without Mitsuha even knowing it existed.

The rest of the Vanelian fleet returned a few days later with a parade of captured ships in tow. Greatly embellished rumors of the battle were already spreading throughout the city, mainly originating in bars from crew members of the sloop and the six ships that got a head start home.

It’s just like that old saying from The Legend of Galactic Heroes Gaiden*: “Heroes and brave men abound at bars, but you won’t find a single one in a dentist’s chair.”*

Since the rest of the fleet docked, the number of sailors raving about their heroic victory quintupled. They needed to exaggerate the story even further to attract attention and get treated to free drinks. And thus, the small skirmish was twisted into an epic naval battle on the scale of Armageddon and Ragnarok.

…That's not my fault.

"So your brother returned safely?" Mitsuha asked one of the girls at the Society tea party.

"Yes! He suffered some minor injuries, but they'll heal in no time. He distinguished himself by leading a raid onto an enemy ship, and it was unofficially announced that he'll receive a promotion!"

"Wow! Congratulations!"

"Thank you!"

While some of the distant relatives of the Society girls fell victim, no one's immediate family member was lost. They all looked cheerful as a result. That mood pervaded not just Society, but the entire country. Except for the people who lost their loved ones, that is.

Casualties were unavoidable in war. A country might not want to send its citizens to their deaths, but acquiescing to the opposing country's demands risked eventual occupation. Its people would be treated like slaves, which would lead to a bigger tragedy.

That battle could've been much worse; if it had been a close affair instead of a dominant victory for Vanel, they would've continued fighting until both fleets were tattered and many more men were lost. A clear winner emerging early led to less casualties.

"Hee-hee. Our prayers worked," one of the girls giggled.

Huh?

"Yes, the Goddess laid waste to the Noralian fleet just like we prayed," another smiled.

What's happening here? I'm scared…

"Mess with us, and you'll get divine punishment, deadly curses, and more! No one stands a chance against our prayers to the Goddess!"

The girls cheered.

Aaaah! My precious Society is turning into some kind of shady cult!

"Woof! Woof woof woof!"

"What are you doing, Mitsuha?"

"Aah!—Oh, it's just you, Sabine…"

She was in the middle of an experiment with a puppy when Sabine crept up from behind. It was probably someone's pet who'd been let out to roam, which Mitsuha was currently luring with treats.

"Why are you barking at a dog in the middle of the street? Are you ill? Did you get food poisoning or something?" Sabine

asked.

Rude…

Mitsuha answered, “I’m just experimenting to see if I can learn how to speak dog—”

“Huh?”

Oh, crap! I never told Sabine about my language-mastering ability! My only known ability as the Lightning Archpriestess is supposed to be Traversal! She doesn’t know I’m able to jump between worlds either. I only told her that my home country and Japan are on faraway continents in this world.

“Uh, I mean, n-nothing! I was just playing with this dog!”

Sabine narrowed her eyes.

Th-This is bad!

“Now that I think about it,” started Sabine, “you were perfectly fluent in this country’s language when you got here…”

No!

“You even speak the New World’s language like a native even though you couldn’t have known it existed until recently. You’re fluent enough to read and write *and* even make a dictionary…”

No-o-o-o!

“It also sounded like you threatened the orcs and ogres through your megaphone during the battle to defend the capital…”

No-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!

“Mitsuha…”

“Eek!”

“Can you…talk to animals…?”

“I-I don’t know! I swear to the Goddess, I don’t know! That ancient dragon from the battle to defend the capital was able to speak to humans, and when I roared into my megaphone at the orcs and ogres, I was just imitating them! If I could speak to dogs and cats, this place would already be a fluffy paradise!”

“That’s a good point… You’ve always liked animals. If you could speak to them, you definitely wouldn’t let this place be fluffy-less. Besides, that dog was totally ignoring you…”

“How long were you watching?!”

…Dammit. But it’s true; I can’t talk to animals. You don’t know how many times I’ve tried, though. I just can’t give up, so I still try to speak to one every now and then. I’m betting on the slight chance that I might’ve leveled up or learned a new skill… But I haven’t had any success yet.

I mastered orc and ogre language during the battle to defend the capital after speaking to the ancient dragon. So why can’t I learn anything else? Orcs and ogres are humanoid, pretty intelligent for animals and monsters, and their vocal communication is close enough to be considered a language. Are cats and dogs too vocally limited to communicate with humans? Or are their brains too different from human brains for me to scan?

Oh well, yet another failed attempt… But I might level up my language skill or gain a new skill eventually!

What’s that? Life isn’t a video game? …Fine.

But I won’t give up! I will establish my fluffy paradise one day!

The former Vanelian sailor still couldn't believe the life he'd been given.

It'd been some time since Mitsuha von Yamano—the ruler of the neighboring territory, the Archpriestess who was blessed by the Goddess—had captured him and his crewmates. The rumors were that she had the appearance and mind of a child despite her position, and, well…she did. Regardless, she treated them well.

Normally, low-ranking seamen captured after a failed invasion were enslaved, or worse, publicly executed. Instead, the viscountess allowed him to naturalize and even gave him a high-paying job as an instructor in this kingdom's new naval force. His young students looked up to him with respect, and to his continual disbelief, he was even approached by a wonderful woman. He'd been studying hard to learn the local language and he was grateful he did.

Some of his former crew members still struggled with the language but he practiced until he became fluent. He even spent his free time buying candy and handing them out to the local kids in exchange for a chat.

While his comrades wasted hours going out for drinks, he kept up his studies, and it was finally paying off.

Viscountess Yamano pointed out, "Why are you only ever practicing with girls?" but he failed to see why it should bother her. If he could get anyone to speak with him in exchange for his candy, why wouldn't he choose cute girls over boys? Some people

might prefer speaking to boys, but he preferred girls, and he didn't think there was a problem with that.

Back in Vanel, he'd been a lowly sailor who worked long hours for little pay and had no romantic prospects. Here in Zegleus, he had a high-paying trade job and was even treated as a normal citizen. On top of that, he was considered a promising stock for marriage in his rural town. *Me? Seriously?!* he thought.

He and the other crew members were asked to teach the local people how to operate a sailing ship, but they wouldn't be made to fight Vanel directly. The distance between the two lands made it highly unlikely their fleets would meet in battle, anyway. He didn't even know if Zegleus was capable of reaching Vanel.

If a war did break out between the two nations, he was prepared to fight for Zegleus. He didn't owe a damn thing to a country that treated him no better than a slave. *I'd fight the devil himself to protect the woman I love and this country that treats me like a human being,* he vowed.

One day, Viscountess Yamano gave him and his fellow former Vanelians shocking news: the Kingdom of Noral had antagonized Vanel, and the two countries were very likely to engage in naval battle soon.

Their homeland was too far away for them to help, however. It'd take months to sail there. Besides, what could they have done? They were nothing more than a bunch of poorly trained guys who were gambled away for an impossible expedition on three outdated warships.

“I’m thinking of sending a volunteer fleet from our country to support Vanel,” suggested Mitsuha.

Whaaaaat?! He was stunned. *But it’d take months just to get there!*

“I’m gonna take us in a flash using the Goddess’s power,” she continued.

What the hell?! The Goddess’s power is terrifying! Isn’t this kingdom at war with Vanel, though?!

“For one day alone, your three ships will return to their original affiliation and fight for Vanel. Returning to your home country is impossible, but would you be willing to use the Goddess’s power to put on one last grand show? It might even benefit your families back home somehow… I’ll pay you all a military salary, of course.”

Holy crap! Is this really happening?!

Viscountess Yamano’s a tidal wave, and I’m along for the ride!

And so the man returned to the *Kalliad*—the flagship of the expedition fleet—for the first time in many months. This time, he was aboard as an instructor to his beloved students who were racing around the deck to operate the sails.

What am I doing this for? For Vanel, my home country? For my parents, little brother, and little sister back home?

No…! I’m here today as a citizen of Zegleus. Here I stand with my students to face the enemy!

This mission was voluntary. There was no penalty for declining so I could've refused if I wanted to.

And yet, I chose to be here. I chose to face this battle of my own free will. This isn't something I was forced into like in the past. This one's for me.

This battlefield belongs to me and me alone!

"I know you've been up to something behind my back, Mitsuha. What is it?" Count Bozes asked out of the blue.

"Huh? Uh, I'm not up to anything…"

Oh crud. I've been gone a lot lately dealing with New World stuff. Is that why he's suspicious?

My project in the New World is a personal endeavor, though. The initial investment I got from the king was a personal loan. I've long since recovered what I spent and even made a profit, but I still need that money to bluff so people will believe I'm wealthy. I can't return it yet.

The count stared at Mitsuha, waiting for her to answer.

Damn it… He's not gonna let this go…

Only two people on this continent knew about her activity in the New World: Colette and Sabine. She'd jumped a few citizens from the fishing village and her maids over there to man the small sailing boats and play ship spirits, respectively, but those were quick and easy one-time gigs, and she didn't tell them where they were or what the work was for.

Count Bozes knew that Traversal didn't actually cost much life force, so she hoped he'd assume she was staying in the capital or elsewhere in her territory when she was away from her residence.

Why is he suspicious of me? I'd better check. This could grow into a bigger problem if I don't take care of it now.

"Um… Why do you think I'm up to something?" she asked timidly as she gauged his reaction.

"Mitsuha, I know you've been attending noble parties and visiting noble estates without telling us."

Eek!

"H-How did you—oops, I mean…"

"Cat's out of the bag. Now tell the truth!"

"Urrgh… How did you figure that out?"

She needed to know for future reference. Did he have spies? Did someone betray her?

"You only overeat when you're invited to a noble's estate where you can eat fancy food for free. And I can guess the frequency of your party attendances. You've clearly been going to more parties and banquets than I am aware of. Tell me, what faction are you associating with?" Count Bozes demanded.

Oh, I see why he's worried. Rumor has it that he's going to become a marquis soon. He's also a sworn ally of Marquis Eiblinger, has the royal family's favor, is close with the Lightning Archpriestess, and is the cornerstone of the new navy. The count's influential enough that his faction could become the biggest and

strongest in the kingdom. It makes sense that he'd panic if he thought I might be cheating on him with another faction.

Kinda like when a wife interrogates her husband, "Care to tell me where that lipstick on your collar came from?!"

Wait, how does he know I've been attending more parties and banquets? Figuring that out is my top…priority…

What's he looking at? My modest yet graceful chest? No, he's looking a little lower, toward my…belly…

Mitsuha gasped, "Ah…"

"Ah?"

"Aaaaaaaah!"

Chapter 82:
Postwar Business

“Mitsuha… You haven’t been to any parties recently,” said Count Bozes.

“And whose fault do you think that is?!” she snapped.

“Urk…”

Mitsuha had been growing distant from this kingdom’s high society because of how busy she was in the New World. She hadn’t withdrawn completely; she’d been attending the occasional acquaintance’s birthday or function hosted by a noble she was indebted to.

There was one reason for that: Count Bozes’s horribly insensitive comment. He apparently went to Lady Iris and Beatrice for advice because he was so surprised by Mitsuha’s reaction and received a thorough bashing. *Serves him right!*

“I’m sorry! I truly am! Could you please find it in yourself to forgive me?” he pleaded.

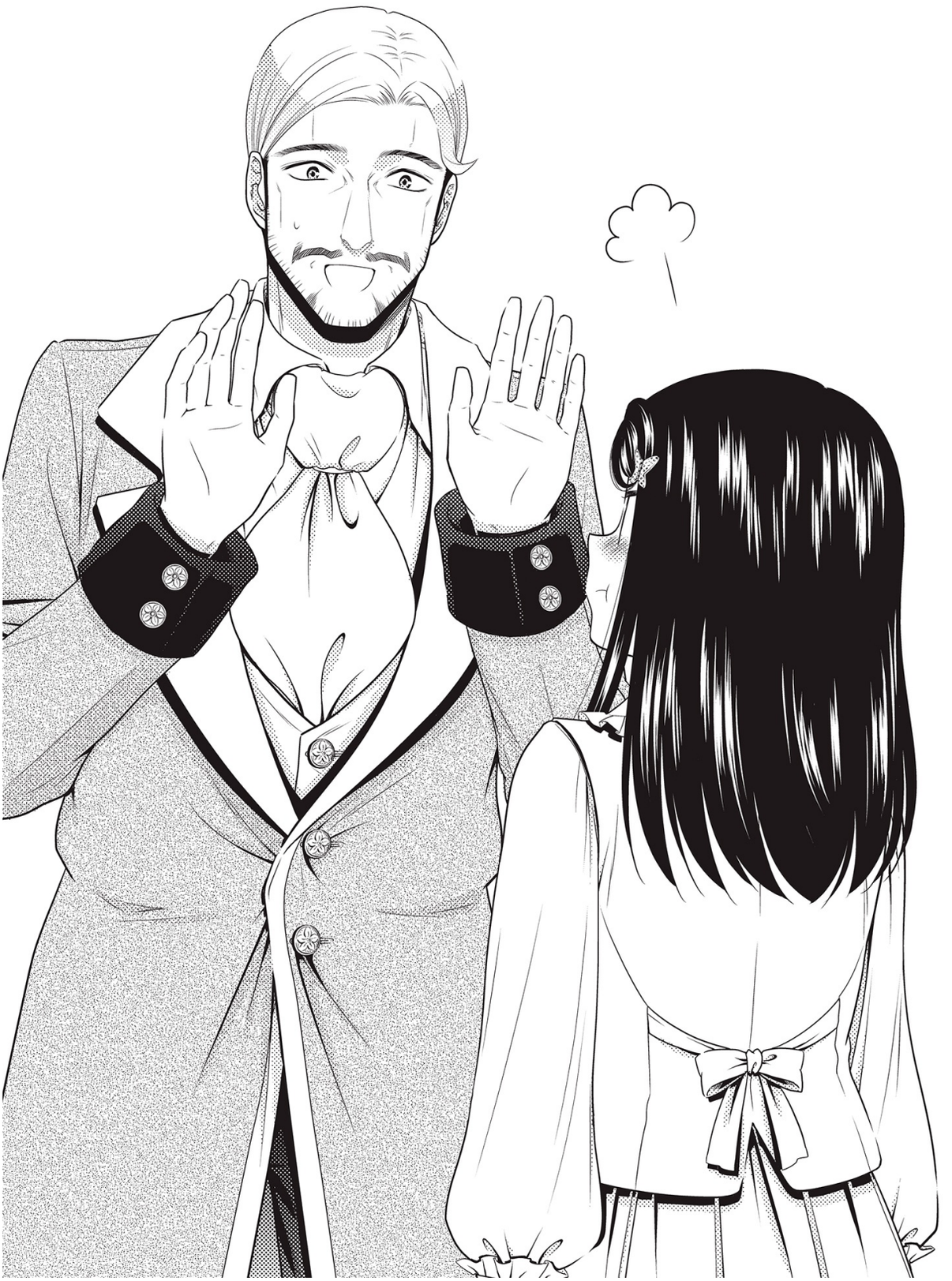
No freakin’ way!

Well, this has gotten him to stop asking me about what I’m up to again, so whatever. It’s fine…

I said it’s fine!

Mitsuha did somewhat understand the count’s position. She was (believed to be) underage, and he was a guardian-like figure to her. That meant that if she didn’t attend a party hosted by one

noble house or another, the others would accuse the count of disallowing her and trying to confine her within his faction.



Parties weren't as bad in this kingdom as in Vanel. She was always swarmed by people making business proposals, but at least no one tried to antagonize, deceive, or exploit her. In Vanel, people saw her as nothing more than a king's illegitimate daughter from a small distant country—exploitable prey. Here, on the other hand, she was thought of as a princess of a great nation, the Lightning Archpriestess who could wield mysterious magic, and the savior of the kingdom. It wasn't hard to see why she was treated differently.

You'd think that the surrounding countries would send assassins after me or try abducting me or offer me a marriage proposal so I'll be a member of their nation, but I guess no one is willing to risk that during this pivotal time when we need to be preparing for invasion from the New World. They're probably also afraid that if they try something funny and get caught, I'll sic my divine soldiers on them. All the neighboring countries might also kick the crap out of them. It's all too risky.

I'm also the only person who's fluent in the New World language and knowledgeable of ships, cannons, and guns. The former crew members of the expedition fleet come close, but they only know how to sail a ship and do simple repairs; they're not experts on shipbuilding and weaponry.

Well, neither am I, but I have some powerful allies. Professor Google, the commenters on my blog, the vast and infinite world wide web, and the library. Ask me any question, and I'll come back

to you with a good answer the next day. That's why everyone thinks I'm so smart.

Actually, I'm pretty sure no one thinks that… Whenever someone asks a follow-up question, I always need another day to get back to them with an answer. Which makes it pretty obvious I'm asking someone else for help. Eh, no matter how I get my answers, I'm still useful for shipbuilding and weapons development.

I'm the key person to the development of the latest ships and weapons on the continent, the princess of a powerful country, the Lightning Archpriestess, the savior of the kingdom, a viscountess, and a young bachelorette. I'm gonna draw people in like flies to honey…or roaches to a sticky trap. I'm sure there are a lot of guys who want to court me…

"Indeed," said Count Bozes. "You've been receiving a lot of marriage proposals."

"You're kidding me!"

Actually, that shouldn't surprise me. People seem to think I'm twelve or thirteen, but it's normal for nobles to get engaged at a young age. If anything, it's weird that this kingdom's trio of princesses are still single. Which apparently is because the first princess's fiancé died…or at least that's what I heard from Sabine and Chii.

Beatrice doesn't have a fiancé… Probably Count Bozes's and Lady Iris's fault.

Hold up. How did he know to say that? It's almost like he was reading my mind…

"Because you started thinking out loud," he responded.

Again?!

"Fine, then… So where are these proposals?" Mitsuha asked.

"I rejected them all."

"What? Why?! You should've at least shown them to me first! What if I got a proposal from a handsome prince or a cute little *shota*-type?!"

"…Shota? What's that?"

"Uh, don't worry about it…"

I look thirteen-ish to the people of this world, so dating a boy who looks my age would mean dating a shota. Speaking of princes, Leuhen—Sabine's younger brother—is adorable. Their older brother, the crown prince, is a little too "Prince Charming" for me… Being his wife would be exhausting.

"So…" said Mitsuha. "Why are these proposals being sent to you instead of me, and why are you rejecting them?! Don't hit the cancel button on my happiness! That's my choice to make."

"No one delivers marriage proposals directly to the person concerned. They're sent to their parents, or if they have no parents, their guardian," answered Count Bozes.

"Huh…"

Noble marriages were more about the families than the individuals getting married, so that custom made sense. Even in

Japan, the nosy matchmaker auntie would bring her proposition to the parents first.

I guess it makes sense that the count would receive my marriage proposals, thought Mitsuha.

One thing about his answer caught her attention, however.

"Are you my guardian, Count Bozes?"

"Wha… Do you really need to ask that question, Mitsuha? After all this time…?" He slumped his shoulders.

Now that he's said it out loud, I guess he is my guardian… He's always helped me and done guardian-like things.

But wait, you never officially addressed it, Count Bozes! Don't look so sad! All right, all right, I shouldn't have said that! I'm sorry!

…Damn it. He used my guilt to get me to commit to attending a party. I swear, skilled nobles and their wily tricks…

Oh well. I'd been thinking it's high time I show my face in high society again. I may as well use a party of the count's choosing for the first battleground of my return…

"Well, if it isn't Viscountess Yamano! Long time no see. Were you traveling? Or were you back at your home country?" one of the party guests greeted.

"I was traveling, actually."

No one in this kingdom thought Mitsuha would ever move elsewhere, so they weren't worried by her traveling. *I'm certainly*

not in Vanel anymore.

"Lady Mitsuha, I would be honored if you attended my son's birthday party next week…"

"Viscountess, if you ever need help with shipbuilding or weapon development, I'd be happy to send you craftsmen from my land!"

"Viscountess Yamano, I'd love to hear more about the clothing made in Yamano County."

"Could we discuss making a large purchase of your lightning corn?"

"I would like to invite you and Princess Sabine to my estate…"

Oh geez, it's happening! They're all flocking to me to shoot their shot! They know they're none the worse for trying, and if they succeed, then jackpot! Nobles sure love to gamble… Which is ironic, 'cause I wouldn't exactly consider that a noble pastime! To be fair, some of these people are owners of large trading companies and not a part of any nobility.

To the second person: Ask Count Bozes directly! That's out of my domain.

To numbers three and four: Those questions concern the development of my territory's industry, so I'll set up a place for us to talk later.

Some of these proposals can be annoying… But it's my duty as the ruler of a territory. My dad used to go out for drinks after work as part of his job. There's no way drinking with your bosses and

clients instead of your close buddies can be fun. It was just another aspect of his job that he had to put up with.

Some salarymen even develop health problems because of all the drinking at client dinners. No one at these noble parties has ever offered me alcohol, though…

"Viscountess Yamano, have you tried any of the delicious foreign cuisine over there?"

"You should try some of those rare fruity desserts!"

"The mixed fruit juice the chef made is exquisite…"

Nooo! My poor figure!

What to do…

Mitsuha looked around at the spoils of war she pilfered from the Noralian fleet—weapons and ammunition, the ship rigging, food, and contents of the safes. *I took the entire safes, actually, not just the contents.*

The best thing to do with the weapons and ammo would be to sell them to the kingdom so they could be loaded onto their naval ships. There was just one teensy little problem: she'd have to explain where she got them from.

There was no way to hide that she used Traversal to lead the three ships into battle. That was fine; she got permission to do just that beforehand and gave a vague explanation of the two warring countries. She even revealed that Vanel, which Zegleus had declared war on, was one of the two countries, and that she was planning on supporting them in this battle. Word would've

gotten around from the former Vanelians anyway, and there was no point in lying about such vital information.

The leaders of this country were aware the war with Vanel was caused by a single rogue merchant's actions, and that Vanel itself was ignorant of the conflict. The only reason the Zegleusians didn't call off the war was because they knew if they ever encountered Vanel again in the future, they could use the accusation of Vanel invading and making the first strike as leverage for negotiations.

…Unfortunately, that would only work if Vanel was willing to negotiate on equal terms. If they judged Zegleus to be an inferior nation they could easily overpower, they could just say, "All right, let's get on with the war, then." If that were to happen, Zegleus would need to demonstrate that their well-rested, well-prepared fleet could crush the Vanelian fleet—which would be tired out from the long voyage getting here—and that they'd have no chance of being colonized or exploited. For that purpose, Mitsuha conveyed that she wanted to organize a volunteer fleet and get combat practice…while leaving out the part about utilizing the battle to prevent Vanel from radically changing its international policy.

She also issued a gag order to prevent the crews from revealing any details about the teleportation tactic they employed. If the leaders of this country knew what she could do in combat, there was bound to be a handful who might say idiotic things like "Do we really need to spend all this money to rush our

warship and weapon development?" or "Maybe we should take the initiative and lay waste to them." The king, Count Bozes, and Marquis Eiblinger knew better than to make such suggestions, but there were a lot of dumb nobles in the world.

Some would passionately argue for attacking Vanel not out of a desire to conquer or take advantage of Mitsuha, but because they genuinely believed it to be what was best for their kingdom and their citizens, and that their duty as a noble required it. Sometimes incompetent allies were a bigger threat than skilled enemies. Mitsuha couldn't risk letting them know more than they needed to.

What's that? You're wondering if I can trust the crews of the ships to keep quiet? That's not a concern. They don't just believe *in the Goddess; they* know *she exists. I swore them to silence on the Goddess's name, and they ain't gonna disobey the girl who was bestowed miraculous powers by their deity. Seafarers are known for being deeply religious, and soldiers even more so because they rely on luck to survive on a daily basis. They won't confess what they know even if they're tortured.*

I also told them to notify me immediately if anyone threatens to harm or fire them for not talking. I'll give them a place in my territory if that ever happens. But they know to answer, "Mitsuha swore us to silence in the Goddess's name," and I don't think Count Bozes will press any further than that.

“Anyway, I’d appreciate it if you could hold on to these for me!” Mitsuha said.

“You’re always dumpin’ the weirdest shit on us…” the Wolf Fang captain sighed.

Mitsuha decided the best place to store the weapons and ammunition was at Wolf Fang’s base.

“I know, but if I leave it in my territory, the gunpowder might get exposed to humidity or worse, explode in an accident… Can you hold it here in your temperature-controlled storehouse? I’ll pay a storage fee, of course!”

“Fine… Ain’t like you’re gonna stop bringin’ us stuff anyway. I’ll find an empty spot in our storehouse for now, and build a new one just for you. If you got any requests for its dimensions or equipment, put them in the computer. We’ll pay for construction, but I’m gonna hold ya to payin’ rent!”

Wow, he’s building a storehouse for me with his own funds? How generous! I suppose he can easily afford it given the money they’ve made off the dragons and their new supplier business. If he’s willing to accept my payment for storage, it’s pretty much like renting out an apartment. It won’t cost the mercenary group anything in the long run…as long as I keep paying to use it. Well, I’m not planning on dying an early death, so I’ll try my best to keep renting the storehouse until Wolf Fang makes back their investment.

Sweet, that’s taken care of. The three ships exhausted most of their gunpowder and bullets in the battle, but it’s not like they’re

gonna encounter another warship and open fire anytime soon. I can keep my spoils here for now.

My work is done!

…In Zegleus, at least.

"Viscountess Yamano, I ask you to please attend this party," Marquis Mitchell proposed.

I knew it, Mitsuha sighed. She'd been considering a brief return to Vanelian high society as well. A lot had happened and she wanted to get a grasp on the current situation and keep up with her connections. She was at Micchan's place to plan for Society's tea parties when the marquis caught her.

Mitsuha responded, "I've stopped asking you to choose my parties, remember?" She'd been making her own judgment on party choice since the incident, which had resulted in her attending significantly less of them. She thought that the marquis had given up on reattaining that role.

"I know. I've already accepted that," he said. "This is not me trying to regain that privilege. I'm simply extending an invitation to attend a party celebrating Vanel's recent naval victory. The party is not about factions, and will be attended by many of the kingdom's chief nobles, merchants, and military leaders. The invitation extends to foreign nobles who are residing in the capital—"

"Count me out!"

“Wha…” The marquis was under the impression that Mitsuha had come to Vanel to research the land for potential trade, and thought this celebration would be a perfect chance to do so.

There was one problem, however.

“The so-called ‘Count Wondred’ and ‘Viscount Ephred’ will be there, right?”

“Urgh… Well… Actually, no man going by either name will be at this party.”

Huh? There’s no way the king and crown prince would skip this kind of event—oh, I get it!

“Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred won’t be attending, but the king and crown prince will. Is that what you mean?”

“Correct.”

I knew it…

“Then I’m out! The one time I’ve interacted with them as the king and crown prince, they tried to intimidate and trick me into sharing compromising information. I’m not stepping within one hundred yards of them again. I wouldn’t feel safe!”

There was nothing Marquis Mitchell could say to that. There was a good chance the king and crown prince would corner her at the party and make excessive requests, assuming she couldn’t refuse them in front of dozens of other nobles in attendance. She’d made it clear to the marquis that she was afraid of that, so he couldn’t blame her for not going.

What? I was rude to them at that party too? Maybe. But they attended as Count Wondred and Viscount Ephred, and it was after

they were rude to me first. That's not a problem.

Their impudence was brushed under the rug because it was nothing more than the act of a simple count and viscount. But now, I know them as "the king and crown prince who summoned a foreign noblewoman to the royal palace and tried to hoodwink her and pressure her with unreasonable demands." No one would blame me for being afraid to go near them. It's only common sense that an underage (-looking) girl, who has no family or retainers nearby, to avoid scary men.

They may be able to strong-arm a noble of their own country to attend the party, but a foreign viscount has no obligation to. I'm not going, and that's final.

There was another reason Mitsuha didn't want to go: there might be a lot of men from the navy who knew her. She'd already met plenty of naval sailors at parties, but this time she was afraid there might be personnel from the port town who only knew her as a wealthy Vanelian citizen from an immigrant noble family—certainly not as a foreign royal or noble who was doing business in the capital. That included those she'd met at the bar and the commander who summoned her to his office.

Not that it'd be a big deal if they found out she wasn't from this country; they were the ones who made the wrong assumption. She hadn't told a lie, and either way, it wouldn't change the fact that she was a noble on a private outing. Still, it was best if no one from the port town saw her.

There was also a good chance she'd have to deal with complaints from some people whose orders were canceled—Lephilia Trading had rejected them because they were on her blacklist. Others had tried to order more than the store's quantity limit. *They'll probably say, "How dare you ignore demands from the Goddess's chosen soldiers!" That ain't gonna work on me…*

They might be heroes in Vanel, but they're nothing more than military men to a foreigner like me. Whatever authority they have as Vanelian nobles couldn't matter less to me either. That might sound hypocritical given that I'm using my status as a foreign noble in this land, but I'm only doing that to speak and negotiate with them on equal terms. Unlike them, I'm not using my status to boss around anyone from another country.

"That party's gonna be nothing but a pain in the ass," said Mitsuha. "I'm not going. Or are you willing to fight off anyone that bothers me, be they a royal, a duke, a marquis, a faction leader, a cabinet minister, or a merchant? If anyone so much as hints that they're looking to exploit me, I'll leave this country and set up a new base elsewhere. I hear Noral is really nice this time of year."

The marquis was at a loss for words.

Sweet, that should be enough to get him to drop it. I really wouldn't get anything out of that party. The merit of free food will get canceled out and then some by the tragedy of my Waist Size Story.

Oh yeah, there's something I need to ask him about.

"Um, Lord Mitchell, I heard the rumors of the Goddess's saints—the divine soldiers from the expedition fleet. Have you heard if their families received any kind of reward?"

"You sure are polite when you want something out of me."

I mean, duh. I was being sassy with him before, but that's because he was trying to force me into doing something I don't wanna do. You obviously have to be polite when asking for something, unless you're a king or whatever.

"Why do you want to know about that?" he asked.

I should've known he'd ask. He wouldn't miss a chance to learn something about me that would be useful in future negotiations.

"Oh, it's just that I have a friend who's an acquaintance of someone on the fleet."

That wasn't a lie. Colette and Sabine had met some of the crew members through their Vanelian language studies.

"I see… This will probably be officially approved and announced in a few days, but the crew members will be granted a portion of the reward for the captured ships and a special bonus, plus medals in accordance with their individual ranks… This will all be given to the bereaved families, of course.

"The money won't last forever, but the families' status as relations of war heroes will. That'll open them up to endless job opportunities. I'm sure anyone would be happy to hire them as long as they're willing to work."

"That's a relief…"

The guys from the expedition fleet will be thrilled to hear this.

A group of men were gathered around Mitsuha, sniffling and sobbing.

She'd just told the former Vanelian crew members about the money and medals their bereaved families—*well, technically the crew members aren't dead, but their families don't know that*—would be receiving. The tears were expected; they may never be able to return home, but knowing that their status as war heroes meant their families would never want for anything and their siblings would have no trouble finding good marriage partners had to be reassuring for them. Their hard work had set up their families for life.

The families of the former Vanelians who weren't at the naval battle would receive the same treatment as well, of course. Everyone in Vanel assumed that the expedition fleet was being manned by the entire original crew. Or their souls, to be more accurate. That included the families of the men who reached the shore on the first three cutters and were currently locked in a dungeon in the capital. Those soldiers weren't any different from the rest of the crew; being assigned to man the cutters didn't make them bad people.

Mitsuha felt bad that they were being incriminated like the merchant who falsely proclaimed himself a governor-general while their crewmates were working high-paying jobs and finding girlfriends. By now, all of the former Vanelian sailors

knew about Mitsuha's Goddess powers too so there was no need to keep them isolated for information control. However, they were the only ones who'd seen the might of a submachine gun, and the kingdom apparently needed a few prisoners from the invasion. Allowing all the invaders to work as ordinary citizens would be questionable from a diplomatic standpoint. They wanted to at least detain the leader and a handful of his subordinates.

The former Vanelian sailors were overjoyed to hear that the family of the unscrupulous merchant wouldn't be receiving any money or honor. They didn't have the highest opinion of the man who curried favor with the king and roped them into a reckless voyage for a get-rich-quick scheme that cost him nothing other than bribe money.

For the merchant, the risk was well worth it. A successful voyage would've meant fame, high social standing, and immense wealth. The only drawback was that failure meant death.

His crew members, on the other hand, were merely fulfilling their duties as soldiers. That meant that even if the voyage succeeded, they would've gotten nothing other than a story to tell their grandkids. Failure, meanwhile, was likely to result in a senseless death on foreign waters. All because of one idiotic merchant's reckless ambition.

While they did end up surviving, they'd never be able to return home and see their families and loved ones again. And whose fault was that? The merchant's, of course, for having the

gall to call himself a governor-general and announce an occupation, essentially declaring war on this land.

I can see why they hate his guts. I'll bet they mutter his name every night, seething for revenge like a certain girl with no name. They're celebrating because they couldn't stand the idea of him taking their glory.

Oh well, that merchant's currently in a dungeon in the capital, so… Wait, why does everyone look a little shifty? Oh, my mention of the merchant probably reminded them of their imprisoned comrades. Those men were just as much a part of the crew as anyone else, and the only reason they're not free is because they had the misfortune of being chosen for the landing team. That probably makes these guys feel guilty about how much better they're having it out here.

That said, I'm sure they know they're not in a position to protest, and that politically, some sacrifices were necessary. They probably discussed among one another about how they could help the imprisoned comrades—their role models, beloved subordinates, and close friends. The smart ones would've shut that down, though, with arguments like "Do you *want to take their place in the dungeon?"*

You need two things in life: hard work and luck. Soldiers especially rely on the latter.

For now, I just hope these guys will overcome their circumstances and savor their good fortune. You never know when

your luck might turn. It could be in your hands one minute, then gone the next…

"…That concludes my report," Mitsuha said in the conference room of the royal palace.

"Hmm…"

Ten days passed since the naval battle. The reason the meeting didn't happen sooner was because she had to pretend she was making the long trip from Bozes County and keep up the front that frequent Traversal was harmful to her. Regardless, her cover story went untold. Nobody asked. They probably assumed she'd take that long to arrive to the capital.

The seven attendees in the small room were Mitsuha, the king, the chancellor, Marquis Eiblinger, the crown prince, the first princess, and Sabine. Count Bozes was absent because he was in his territory.

I get why the crown prince is present, sure. Attending meetings like this is a good learning experience for his future, and it's wise for the heir to have a full grasp on matters in case the king gets injured or sick. But why the heck are Sabine and her sister here? This is a top-secret gathering to discuss highly classified information.

The reason the king didn't raise a ruckus about Mitsuha's life force during her report was because she'd gotten his permission beforehand to use Traversal for the battle. "It's my duty as a

noble of this country to make the sacrifice," she argued and won him over.

…Actually, the real reason he approved it was probably because Sabine didn't react at all when I said I was going to use Traversal. She'd never let me give up such a big chunk of my life force. The king must've realized that Traversal doesn't cost me that much. That goes for the chancellor and Marquis Eiblinger too.

No one said anything, though. They know what'll happen if the word gets out; the other nobles and merchants would panic.

The king summarized, "So we took no damage, but expended a lot of ammunition…"

"That's right," Mitsuha answered. "The experience was well worth the loss of ammunition, though. A warship operated by a crew with no battle experience is all bark and no bite. They gained what they needed."

Sailors who'd gone through intensive cannon-timing training were stationed on each ship. They were paired with former Vanelian crew members who acted as their drill sergeants. The biggest gain was the hands-on practice—like swiftly loading the cannons with gunpowder and ammo on a swaying ship, all while avoiding any explosion accidents.

There was no chance of getting hit by an enemy ship during that battle, but losing a hand or blowing themselves up while reloading wasn't an unlikely occurrence. There was no such thing as total safety on a warship.

“Both sides had about thirty ships, so over sixty vessels were involved in the attack. I didn’t particularly care about how much damage we inflicted, though, so we spent our time firing from a relatively safe distance. That battle wasn’t an all-out final showdown either. It was just a skirmish,” Mitsuha added.

“Thirty ships on each side and the enemy had 1.6 times as many cannons as ours. And you call that a skirmish, huh…” the king said.

Only the newest and biggest ships of the enemy fleet had that many cannons—there were plenty with forty or thirty-two cannons—but there was no need to clarify that. The message she wanted to emphasize was that the enemy was powerful, but they still had time to prepare…if the countries of this continent would band together. They needed to build as much fighting power as they could before the next enemy fleet arrived—likely within the next ten years.

Enough strength to at least completely pulverize a fleet that’s exhausted from a long voyage… Whether I’ll still be around or not…

The navy had finished constructing the prototype of a small sailing boat and was currently working on replicating one of the captured ships. For someone with no experience, copying from an example was the fastest way to make something. They were reproducing the hull exactly.

Mitsuha was ordering the sails from Earth, so they’d be made with the most cutting-edge design elements and sturdiest

material. The sail was everything for a sailing ship; the performance could differ massively depending on the quality of its sails.

Only the first ship built in Zegleus would use sails made on Earth, of course; after that, all ships built would be equipped with sails made within the kingdom. The shipbuilding efforts would be pointless if the ships couldn't be produced domestically from scratch. Mitsuha was having the first sails made on Earth for her peace of mind. She was also considering showing the design for the ship's hull to an expert on Earth once it was far enough along to make sure it'd be sturdy enough. Surely one of the countries on Earth would be able to help her.

Building copycats of some old ships wasn't going to be enough to stand a chance against the countries of the New World. They still needed an advantage—weaponry. Revolving turrets were a pipe dream. Even if they could replicate the exterior, they had no way of engineering the motors to make them rotate. That left fixed cannons as the only choice. They could still get a leg up on the New World by building muzzleloaders, giving them large bores, loading them with cylindro-conoidal bullets, and rifling them.

Their ammunition would consist mostly of high-explosive projectiles. Armor-piercing ammunition would be unnecessary against wooden ships. *I've heard of bullets that are armor-piercing, explosive, and incendiary—talk about a powerful three-for-one—but that'd be overkill.*

They only needed enough force to demolish the invading ships from a distance. Even if they closed in, it was hard to imagine losing in a short-range scuffle. The accuracy and firepower would more than make up for the disadvantage in the number of cannons. They could probably dominate even if they were outnumbered three to one. It might not come to that in the first place; the New World was too far to haul a large fleet over to the Old World.

You might be wondering if we'd be better off building even smaller ships if the only purpose of our fleet is to fight off enemy invasions. You'd be wrong. If the New World sees our tiny ships and determines that we're incapable of crossing the ocean, they won't take us seriously. They'll look at us and think, "Hah, we could attack them any time and they don't even have the means to do the same to us." We'd be a joke. That's why I want to send the message, "Oh, we're perfectly well-equipped to pay your continent a visit, annihilate your ships, and set your harbors on fire whenever the mood takes us."

And in order to do that, we'll need forty-cannon ships. Those can be our first ship class. Type-1. We can think about building smaller ships that are easier to operate afterward.

I could introduce them to the US standard-class battleship models, but that might interfere with this world's engineering progress. Besides, this country is barely ready for something so big. It's gonna be a long time before these guys invent superior ship designs on their own. For now, there are way more merits to mass-

producing one standardized model. It'd boost shipbuilding productivity, fleet coordination, and transferability of sailors' skills regardless of the vessel they're on.

Type-1-class is a boring name. I should think of something better…

The word for sailing ship in Japanese is hansen*. Maybe I can do something with that… Hansen…*

Oh, I know! I'll call it the Stan-class after the Unsinkable Battleship himself! The first ship will be named the Western Lariat*!*

And the smaller ships with large-caliber cannons that'll be built afterward can be called the Hulk-class. The first ship in that class will be named the Axe Bomber*! I'll hear no objections!*

Anyway, I'm spurring naval expansion in preparation for the worst-case scenario, but if everything goes according to my plan, "Operation Fake Princess (name subject to change)," I'll be able to prevent a dogfight from breaking out in the first place. Lephilia Trading, the partner stores, and Society are all a part of that operation.

Obtaining and controlling information is important in warfare. A few lines worth of text can accomplish more than ten thousand soldiers fighting to the death.

Waging information warfare is a very cost-effective method. Not only can you learn things that will give you an advantage in battle, but you can also propagate false information to confuse the enemy.

"…Are you about ready?" asked Marquis Eiblinger.

“Huh? For what?” Mitsuha uttered bluntly, caught off guard by the sudden question.

“To quit daydreaming and continue our discussion?”

“Oh, whoops…”

They covered a few more matters before ending the meeting. The meeting’s only purpose was for Mitsuha to deliver her report, so it was relatively short and featured no arguments. The actual debate and decision-making based on her report would come later. That was why this gathering was kept to the inner circle. *I still can’t believe I’m part of an inner circle with royalty…*

Formal meetings regarding Mitsuha’s findings would likely be held in the coming days. Those meetings wouldn’t require her attendance, obviously. The kingdom’s leaders could handle all that.

I’m gonna stay away from the New World for a while. Vanel is way too crazy right now. I think I’ll lay low until their army, the royal palace, and high society calm down.

I’ll keep restocking Lephilia Trading and the partner stores and attending Society tea parties, of course. I can’t inconvenience others because of personal issues. I’m a woman of her word.

Now that I have less to do in the New World, I can focus on Yamano County. I’ve been spreading myself too thin between my kingdom, the New World, my business in Japan, everything with Wolf Fang, and the countries on Earth. My top priority should be

the development of my county and the happiness of its citizens. Some leader I am to my own people…

So without further ado, let's get back to some county management! I should have a lot more free time in the coming months!

Mitsuha would later look back with wonder at how she could've ever thought such a thing.

Bonus Chapter 1:
Everyone Wants to Know,
Where the Heck is Mitsuha von Yamano?

“…For the love of the Goddess, where is Mitsuha?!”

Beatrice was in a mood. She was thrilled when she was entrusted with Beatrice Company, placed in charge of the Hollow Needle Island and the company headquarters on it (although the building itself was just for decoration), and even given a room in the Yamano County residence. She thought she’d be able to spend more time with Mitsuha, but the viscountess was never around.

Which was why she was terribly miffed.

“She’s not in the capital, right?” she asked.

“N-No, my lady…” stuttered Colette, unsure how else to answer. She spoke casually with Mitsuha, but for some reason, she was still intimidated by Beatrice.

Actually, there was nothing unusual about her behavior; a common village girl was in the presence of the daughter of her home county’s lord. Of course she was feeling queasy. If anything, it was her relationship with Mitsuha that was unusual.

But what about her relationship with Princess Sabine? If Colette could speak with a princess on equal terms, why would Beatrice’s social status bother her?

Perhaps it was because she saw Sabine not as the third princess, but as Mitsuha’s friend. That was how Mitsuha first introduced her. They’d even spent months traveling together. On

the contrary, she only knew Beatrice as her county lord's daughter. She didn't share an adventure or spend enough time to form a bond.

She could hardly be blamed for that.

That didn't stop Beatrice from wanting to join in when she saw Colette chatting with Mitsuha or Sabine. (How the third princess was able to visit from the capital so often was a mystery.) But whenever she did, the younger girl froze up and left. It made her feel awkward and guilty for seemingly chasing her away.

The reason for Colette's behavior was simple: Mitsuha didn't introduce Beatrice as a friend like she did with Sabine. As a result, Colette saw Beatrice strictly as her master's guest and Count Bozes's daughter. She could only act as a commoner does toward a noble.

Beatrice, on the other hand, had never met Colette as a village girl from her family's territory. By the time they'd met, Colette was already the Yamano household's second-in-command and a vassal trainee—which seemed like a contradiction, but that was neither here nor there. Beatrice was fifth in command of the Bozes household behind her parents and two older brothers. From that standpoint, it almost felt like Colette held a higher social position than her.

Anton the butler, Willem, Miriam, and the county's other figureheads were only advisors and board members. Their duty was to serve the ruler, and they had no authority themselves.

When Mitsuha was absent, Colette took over as the acting ruler and decision-maker of Yamano County. She had the help of the advisors, of course, but she was familiar with the weapons from Earth, Wolf Fang, and the true scope of the Lightning Archpriestess's abilities. She was able to make the call on how much the viscountess could handle upon her return. On top of that, the girl would've rather chosen death than betray her master. No wonder why she was so trusted.

Mitsuha would never allow such a thing to happen, of course.

Regardless, Beatrice saw Colette as the Yamano family's number two, the only person who could take command during Mitsuha's absence, and the land steward of this county—not that Colette did any of the administrative labor. She left all that to the staff. A girl no older than ten serving as the ruler's proxy and land steward was certainly strange, but the ruler herself was thought to be no older than thirteen, so no one questioned it.

Given her lofty status in Yamano County, you'd think that Colette could be a little more assertive as the second-in-command when addressing a noblewoman, but it was going to take time to get over the mindset that she was just a village girl from Bozes County speaking to the daughter of the lord.

There was one other reason why Colette had a difficult time being around Beatrice: the fact that Mitsuha hadn't disclosed to her the full truth about her Traversal ability. Unless Beatrice was ever let in on the secret that Traversal hardly burdened Mitsuha at all, that she frequently jumped between the capital, her county,

Japan, and the New World, and that she could summon Wolf Fang whenever she wished, there wasn't much they could talk about. Colette, Sabine, and Mitsuha often brought up their long trip on the *Good Ship Lollipop* and their experiences in Japan and the New World. It was challenging to share a conversation without mentioning any of that.

Thus, Colette struggled to come up with topics to talk about with Beatrice. There weren't many things in common between the daughter of a noble and a former small-village girl.

Their problems were exacerbated by Beatrice's complicated feelings toward Colette. She'd already been a little upset because she felt like Mitsuha had stolen her longtime friend Sabine and Sabine had stolen Mitsuha from her. Now, Colette had stolen *both* of them from her…or so she felt. She was more than a little peeved.

But Beatrice was a proud young noble. Intelligent, kind, and fair. She knew Colette was a good person and knew better than to bully or harass her. However, that didn't mean that she was able to bring herself to say, "Let's put aside our status as noble and commoner and just be friends." As such, she lived her days in woe, wishing she could join Colette, Mitsuha, Princess Sabine, along with the Munchkin Maids plus Leah, but forever unable to do so.

Little did Beatrice know, Colette also wanted to get along with her.

Colette had already befriended a princess. By comparison, a count's daughter should be a piece of cake, right? As a commoner, however, she could never—ever!—voice that herself. She would only risk being so forward with Beatrice with intermediation from Mitsuha, who had absolute influence over them both, and with mutual consent. Speaking casually to a count's daughter out of the blue was an insult so great it could get her executed or enslaved.

…Well, it was unlikely the Bozes family would do anything like that, but other noble families might, and Colette couldn't rule out the possibility entirely. No commoner would ever trust in the magnanimity of a noble family and put themselves and their family in mortal danger. Even a child like Colette knew better. Casually chatting up Beatrice was not an option right now.

This entire situation was Mitsuha's fault for not understanding commoner-noble dynamics and for not formally introducing them to each other as friends of hers. Mitsuha was able to befriend Beatrice and Sabine right away, and watched Colette quickly warm up to herself and Sabine, so she probably assumed there wouldn't be a problem. She wasn't aware of how village girls typically behaved toward the nobles of their territory, or that Colette only became friends with Sabine because Mitsuha was there and they shared a unique experience of adventuring together for months on a diplomatic mission…

"Now that I think about it," Beatrice pointed out, "you disappear sometimes too, Colette. For days at a time, at that…"

Grk! Colette twitched.

“Also, there are times when Mitsuha’s gone and you’re here, and times when you’re both gone, but never times when she’s here and you’re not…”

Grkgrk! Her stomach did a somersault.

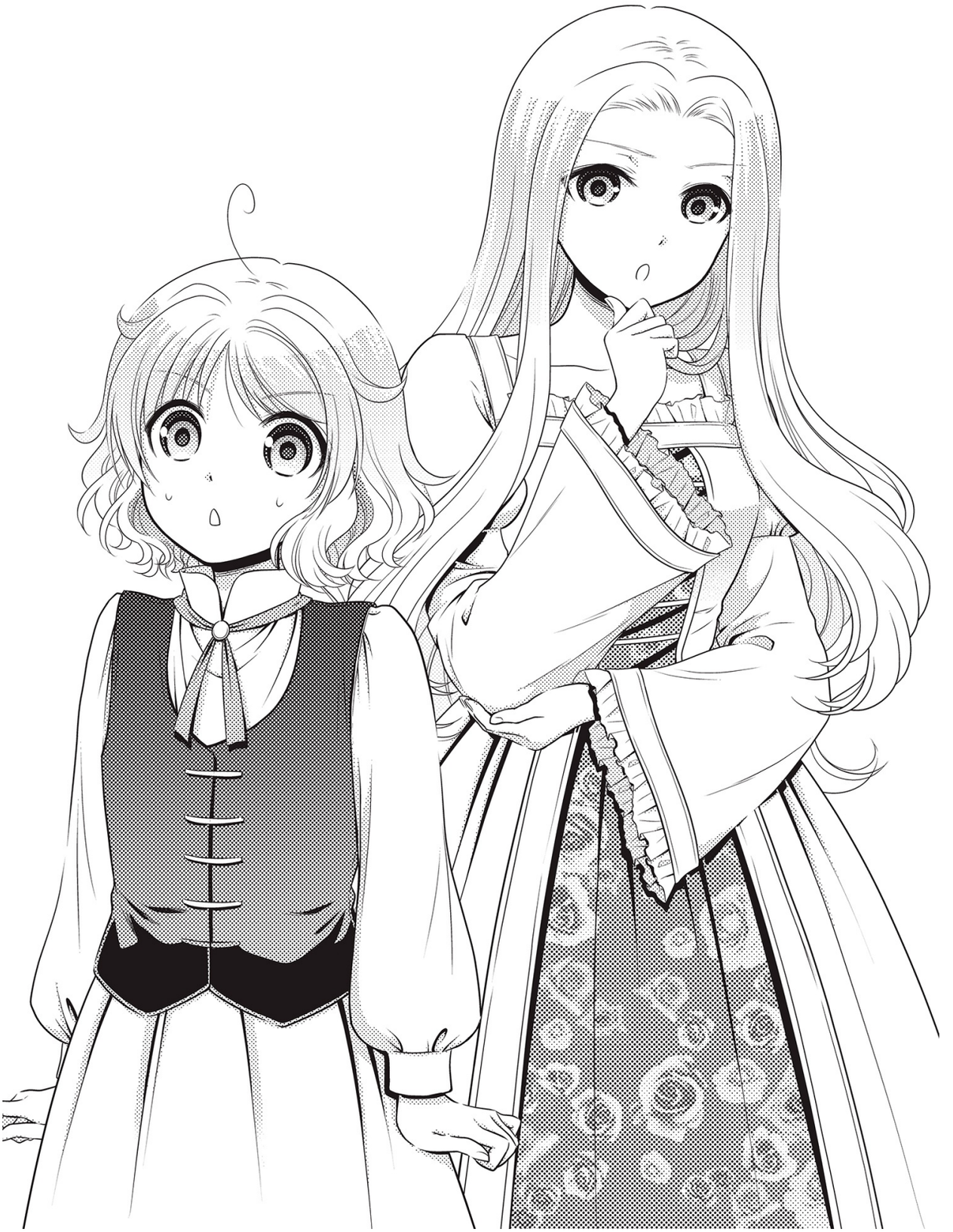
“U-Umm, th-that’s because I have to be around to serve Lady Mitsuha when she is here. I am only able to take leave when she’s away. Sometimes I go on overnight trips to one of the villages for inspection or to visit my parents back home.”

That answer didn’t quite make sense. You’d think at least one of them—the master or the second-in-command—should always be present at the residence. Unless they were traveling together, Mitsuha and Colette should take turns being away from the property.

Beatrice didn’t pick up on that, however. She, like Colette, wanted to spend as much time as possible with Mitsuha, so she didn’t question the girl’s logic.

“Oh, that’s right, I heard your parents’ house is half a day away by foot,” Beatrice said.

She learned that from Mitsuha. Colette wasn’t close enough with her to share such personal information. Either way, Colette’s actual travel time was zero because Mitsuha jumped Colette to her village and back whenever she visited home.



As a random aside, Beatrice's home was also half a day away by foot. Colette's village and the Bozes County capital (which was a regular-sized town) were both closer to the Yamano County residence than they were to each other.

Beatrice would never make the journey by foot, of course; she traveled in a carriage with her personal guards. Now that the county border was well-kept under Mitsuha's maintenance, she could get back to the Bozes County mansion in just a few hours.

The personal guards were Count Bozes's soldiers who escorted Beatrice whenever she visited Yamano County. They stayed at the Yamano County residence until it was time for their young master to head home. In the meanwhile, they spent their time training; coaching Yamano County's soldiers; visiting local schools to tell the kids about their jobs and adventures, including the hardships and failures from their youth; helping elderly couples with household chores; and offering manual labor in the farming village and the mountain villages. The guards spent their days in Yamano County doing as they pleased. Soon enough, they were admired by the villagers and children, and they got to indulge in the delicious meals at the county residence every day. Once every three days, they were even served alcohol—all for free!

The Bozes County soldiers fought over the right to serve as Beatrice's guards, and it wasn't hard to see why.

Beatrice muttered, "Well, I suppose Mitsuha can't get to the capital and back in just a few days."

She wasn’t aware of how freely Mitsuha was able to use Traversal, so she had no idea how quickly she—often with Colette and Sabine in tow—zipped around between the county residence, the capital, Japan, and the New World. In fact, she didn’t even know Japan or Vanel existed.

“Hmm…”

The young noble girl began to think. She wanted to spend more time with Mitsuha, just enough to nestle down and have a deep conversation. That would allow her to subtly ask Mitsuha to help her get acquainted with Colette, and eventually become a part of their circle.

How could she accomplish that?

…*Oh, I know!* Beatrice thought. *I can serve as the commander for the second Bozes caravan to the capital! As a Bozes, I’m more than qualified. And if I’m to accompany the caravan, Father will want to ensure I’m perfectly safe.*

Under normal circumstances, that would mean he’d never let me go… But what if I got Mitsuha involved? Father already wants me and my brothers to get close with her. And more importantly, in the event of a crisis that not even the guards could tame—like a bandit or monster attack—Mitsuha could use her secret art to flee. It’s the surest safety measure…

I know it’s a forbidden magic that eats away her life force, but the odds of our guards getting overwhelmed by bandits or monsters are less than one in ten thousand. That’s unlikely enough to dismiss it as unthinkable. Besides, no bandits would ever attack

a caravan flying the Bozes and Yamano County flags, and you never see more than a stray goblin or kobold on the road between here and the capital. That means Mitsuha won't have to use her power. She'll just be a lucky charm that ensures the safety of the trip.

This plan is perfect! I'm sure Father and Mother will approve of it!

And so Beatrice's plan played out smoothly…

Bonus Chapter 2:
Colette's Family

"I hope our Colette is serving little Mitsuha well…" said Erene.

"She's an apprentice, remember? She's still learning. It'll be a long time before she's ready to help her in a meaningful way," answered Tobias.

Colette's parents were at home having a conversation. Neither were the loud and chatty type, so the house instantly became quiet—a little lonely, even—when the bright and bubbly Colette wasn't around.

They couldn't be upset about the reason she was gone, however. Viscountess Yamano—the lord of the neighboring territory, the kingdom's savior, the Lightning Archpriestess, and a dear friend of their daughter with whom she survived a near-death experience—had invited her to serve as a vassal candidate. That was an unthinkable success story for a child from a rural village. It would've been no less shocking if a prince on a white stallion appeared one day saying, "You're the long-lost princess who went missing as an infant."

"I still can't believe that our Colette… Or that little Mitsuha became a noble—and not only that, became the viscountess of the land next to us and hired Colette. Truly unbelievable," Tobias lauded.

"Hmm-hmm, me neither. It still feels like a dream," agreed Erene.

The two stared into each other's eyes.

"Colette will be just fine. She has her father's strength, after all," Erene said.

"And she has your wisdom and purity of heart, love."

"Hmm-hmm."

"Haha…"

They wrapped their arms around each other and giggled.

"Blegh!" a voice uttered out of nowhere. "I wish I could unhear that! I'm gonna barf…"

"Seriously. Dad summons us home because he's got 'something that needs to be discussed' or whatever and the first thing we see when we get here is our parents making sweet talk… Gimme a break…"

A teenage girl and boy stood outside the door looking absolutely disgusted. There was only one public coach every few days scheduled to make a stop in this area. Naturally, the two caught the same one home, and upon opening the front door, they were subjected to the sight of an intimate and horribly sappy moment between their parents.

The teens were Colette's older sister and brother. Her sister married and moved to a different village when she turned fifteen, and her brother had been working in the Bozes County capital since he was twelve. They'd both just come home for the first time in a while after being contacted by their father.

"Huh? Where's Colette?" the two asked.

They apparently only caught the last part of the sweet nothings.

“WHAAAT?! C-Colette is friends with V-V-Viscountess Yamano, the Lightning Archpriestess?! And was hired by her as a vassal candidate?!”

Colette’s siblings were beyond flabbergasted.

“M-My baby sister…”

“That little Colette…”

“…is going to be a vassal of the Lightning Archpriestess!” they exclaimed.

The boy could only imagine what would happen if his employer found out. The same with the girl and the family she married into.

“We’re gonna get way too much attention! And it’ll be awkward!”

The fact that neither one of them thought of using their sister’s position to their advantage was quite telling of whose offspring they were. The daughter was living with her husband’s family in a nearby village, and the son was working in the county capital. They were both doing well enough in life to want to maintain the status quo.

“I trust my husband and my in-laws,” the daughter hesitated, “but there could be bad apples among their relatives. The village mayor and the other chairpersons are fine people too, but they’re

still only human… Anyone could let themselves slip and act on impulse.”

The son grumbled, “My life’s gonna suck too if coworkers and clients start asking me to introduce them to the Lightning Archpriestess. That means there’s only one thing for us to do…”

“Let’s pretend we didn’t hear anything!” they chimed.

“We knew you’d say that!” Tobias and Erene saw it coming and laughed.

“You don’t need to go around telling people about Colette,” said Tobias, “but I thought it’d be best for you to know. I’d much rather you find out from us before someone else approached you. I didn’t want anyone taking advantage of your ignorance and tricking you or forcing you into making promises. It’s much safer for you to know than not.”

“That makes sense…”

They had no arguments against their father’s reasoning.

Colette was always a sprightly girl. She had her parents and her older sister and brother in her life, but there were no children in the village close to her age. Her siblings looked after her and played with her while their parents were working, but eventually, her sister moved out to get married and her brother left home around the same time to work in the capital.

It was undecided whether her brother would settle down in the capital area of Bozes County or return to the village to look after the household, but the absence of her siblings resulted in a

period of terrible loneliness. It was at this time that Mitsuha appeared. Who could blame the poor little girl for growing so attached?

Colette had found Mitsuha on the brink of death and saved her by bringing her to the village, and Mitsuha immediately returned the favor by saving Colette from a pack of wolves. Of course she'd immediately feel devoted to her.

Never in her wildest dreams would she have guessed that Mitsuha was a noble—or rather, that she would soon become a noble. That was to say nothing of her becoming a hero to the kingdom and an envoy of the Goddess.

"So… How many people know about Colette?" the son asked.

"Hmm… Everyone in the village, for starters. There's no way anyone missed the news that Colette saved an unconscious girl in the woods, and then that girl saved *her* by wiping out a family of wolves, getting greatly injured in the process. Word of that incident has spread to other villages too." Tobias turned to his daughter. "That includes yours, right?" She nodded. "As for Colette training to become a vassal, everyone in our village knows. However, the mayor warned us not to tell folks from other villages. I'm sure you can see why."

His children nodded. It didn't take a genius to understand why they wouldn't want word of Colette's new position to spread. Some would grow jealous and others would flock to the village asking for mediation with Mitsuha so they could get hired by her too. Some people might even assume that Mitsuha paid Tobias's

family a hefty sum to recruit Colette. There'd be no issues as long as the knowledge stayed in this village—all who lived here were as close as family and would never betray each other—but other villages might grow hostile if they learned of this village's connection to the neighboring territory's lord.

Tobias elaborated, "The people here didn't learn that Mitsuha is an envoy of the Goddess and the savior of our kingdom until much later when the traveling merchants from the capital brought the news. We all know now, and Count Bozes does too. I doubt anyone else knows that Mitsuha's young vassal candidate is from here aside from the viscountess herself and her direct subordinates.

"Typically, lords hire vassals and servants from among their own citizens, or headhunt for talented personnel in the capital. It would never occur to anyone that Mitsuha hired a village girl from another lord's territory. No one will ever look at Colette, a vassal candidate of Viscountess Yamano, and connect her to this village."

"That's…a good point," his son said. His daughter nodded.

"In short, this isn't something we need to hide, but we shouldn't go out of our way to tell people about it either," Tobias concluded.

The siblings fell silent.

Colette wasn't a fountain of knowledge—she never went to school, after all—but she was far from dumb. She brimmed with curiosity, and dove headfirst into any challenge without fear. Her

ability to draw the most optimal conclusion out of the information she gathered was more than enough to describe her as “brilliant.” The cute, energetic girl was the pride and joy of the family.

No matter how clever Colette was, however, she was just a simple village girl.

When you’re raised as a villager, you’re expected to marry a villager from your own community or somewhere close by. Live as a villager, die as a villager.

That was the fate of all commoners born in the backwoods.

But by some mischievous twist of fate, Colette was given a chance to leap out of her small settlement. And not only that, to become a vassal candidate and the best friend of a new viscountess who was also the Goddess’s envoy. What else awaited her?

“I wonder how far she’ll go,” Erene pondered.

“We’re talking about Colette here.”

“I think we all know the answer to that…”

“The sky’s the limit!” the family chorused.

“You know what I’m worried about, though? That she’ll break some of the viscountess’s expensive furniture and tableware with that monstrous strength she inherited from you,” Erene fretted.

“Plus, she’s got a grip that could crush a person’s spine when she hugs with too much enthusiasm. Hopefully no one gets hurt. I’d hate for something to happen to Mitsuha,” mulled Tobias.

Their son, however, wasn't concerned. "Come on, Mitsuha is the Goddess's envoy. I'll bet she could recover from a broken spine in no time."

"Oh, good point!"

It was true. Healing a broken bone, a sliced nerve, an opened blood vessel, or a torn muscle wouldn't be nearly as hard as regrowing a lost limb from nothing. One night of rest was all she needed to recover.

Unfortunately, only Mitsuha had that kind of healing power. If Colette were to glom on to anyone else, there would be some serious injuries.

Thankfully, Colette only launched her torpedo hugs at her family members and Mitsuha—although an adult wouldn't get more than a bruise.

"Changing the topic," said Tobias. "Lately I've been hearing more and more people call this village 'Colette Village.' Not just in our area—folks from the county capital, other territories, and the royal capital have been saying it too."

"Don't tell me…" Erene trailed off.

"Yep. It's probably Mitsuha's doing. We'll have to hope no one makes the connection to her new vassal candidate…" Tobias said. "Actually, no. That's not a concern at all! No lord would be able to name a village in a different territory after one of her servants, especially not if that territory's lord outranks her. Besides, this village has a name already. And what parent names their daughter after their village? They might even take this as proof

that she has nothing to do with this village. Also…" Tobias slumped his shoulders, "…our fellow villagers have started calling us 'The Colette Family' and 'Colette's house.' No one here refers to us by *my* name anymore…"

Tobias sighed as he stared off longingly into the distance.

Bonus Chapter 3:
A Lady's Training

"Mitsuha, why are you so ungraceful?" Sabine uttered out of the blue.

"What the heck…?"

Mitsuha and Sabine were having a perfectly ordinary conversation on the third floor of Mitsuha's General Store when Sabine popped the question.

"Honestly, I've been thinking that for a while."

"A *while*?! That's quite a thought you've been sitting on all this time!"

She's really having a go at me, isn't she…

"Whether you're in public or eating with me in private, you're always so…ungraceful. You can't even dance, and there's no care in the way you carry yourself."

"Grk!"

"I suppose you can feign it well enough that people don't think you're a commoner. But you obviously haven't been taking your schooling as a proper lady seriously."

"Urgh…"

Well, duh. I'm a pure common thoroughbred, commonest of the commoners. Of course I haven't had any etiquette training. All I'm doing is mimicking what I've seen in manga, novels, anime, movies, foreign dramas, and what I've read on the internet.

“I thought people were giving me a pass because they assumed the practices associated with ladylike behavior differ in my homeland.”

“It’s not *what* you’re doing that’s the problem. It’s that there’s no elegance to your motions. Every gesture should be intentional down to your fingertips. You lack core strength, and your posture is bad too. You’re good at crushing your opponents with words, but you don’t know how to maneuver someone with gentle persuasion. You can’t ride horses, and you don’t know how to fight or use a dagger. Well, I guess ladies from your country don’t need to learn self-defense techniques if they have a gun.

“And I heard about the rumors,” Sabine finished off, “that you don’t have a musical bone in your body!”

“Ouch!”

“You’re a princess. Why haven’t you received proper etiquette training? You’re not the daughter of a lowly concubine or a mistress of common background, right? You’re clearly knowledgeable and educated, and there’s not a scar on your clear skin—it’s not like you were trapped in a tower or abused.”

“Y-Yeah… I got along just fine with my parents and sibling…”

Sabine’s asking some real sensitive questions… She doesn’t normally pry into personal matters so aggressively.

“Then why don’t you have any proper etiquette as a lady?!” she huffed.

Oh—is she…worried about me?

“You’ll never find a husband this way! Actually, that’s not true… There are plenty of men who are dying to marry you because of your status as the Lightning Archpriestess, the princess of a powerful country, and a viscountess… But you’ll be ridiculed at parties and banquets—they’ll call you a barbarian with no manners. I mean, no one will say that to your face, but a handful of women are jealous of you. Women in high society are two-faced.”

“You haven’t even had your debutante ball yet, Sabine. How do you know so much?!”

“This is common sense! Something you seem to lack entirely!”

Wow, she’s actually angry. This must be a serious concern, then…

Which means… Uh-oh!

…And so Mitsuha began her lady’s training (crash course version). She brought Colette along so she wouldn’t have to suffer alone. *This is for Colette’s future too, actually!*

“Now turn! Focus! All the way to the tips of your fingers and toes!” the instructor commanded.

Rather than teach Mitsuha herself, Sabine brought a professional from the royal palace. She was apparently the person who oversaw Sabine’s etiquette training.

…Does she just want to drag me through the same pain she experienced?

“Says the person who dragged *me* into this!” Colette cried.

“Oh, did I say that out loud? Whoops.”

Colette was fuming.

Hang with me! There’s no way I could do this alone!

“No talking! Now turn! On your toes!”

How did I get myself into this?!

Afterword

FUNA here.

The anime adaptation of this series is currently airing on TV and the internet—and it's getting good reviews!

…Yeah, that's right! This series is now an anime!

It's the second anime adaptation of one of my works. *Didn't I Say to Make My Abilities Average in the Next Life?!* got one in the fall of 2019.

I dreamed of this, but to think the day would actually come…

This was the last of my three titles to get novelized, but it's the first one I wrote and published. That makes it my debut piece.

The story lived entirely in my head for over twenty years because side jobs were forbidden at my previous profession. So while it may appear at first glance that it was influenced by similar novels on *Shosetsuka ni Naro,* it actually wasn't at all. The website didn't even exist when I thought of the characters, setting, and plot over two decades ago…

That being said, there were a lot of stories that involved characters being transported to or reincarnated in other worlds back then as well. A few examples are *Barsoom* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the *Michael Kane* trilogy by Michael Moorcock, and *Princess Kaguya.* (From her point of view, she was reincarnated as a beautiful girl in another world and scored herself a reverse-

harem situation surrounded by rich powerful men before finally returning to her original world.)

As such, stories involving reincarnation in another world or time slips were familiar to anyone who enjoyed science fiction or fantasy.

In those stories, though, the main characters always ended up in a different world or era with nothing but the clothes on their back. I thought it'd be interesting if they could bring friends and modern-day weapons along with them—and then I realized that *G.I. Samurai* already exists! There was also *Sengoku no Nagashima Kyojingun,* in which Manager Nagashima and the Yomiuri Giants participate in a boot camp held by the Japan Self-Defense Forces and get sent back to the Sengoku period with tanks, weapons, and ammunition in tow…

How could I ever top Mr. Kageki Shimoda?! Besides, there's no way I could get permission to use the Giants in my novel…

Anyway, this story was born with no influence from *Shosetsuka ni Naro.* Despite that, it was fated to see the light of day on the website…

On a related note, an anime adaptation for my series *I Shall Survive Using Potions!* was announced in February of 2023.

That's three home runs at three at-bats. I can't believe it…

And with that, my ammunition has been exhausted. Now I'll never get to experience the excitement of wondering, "Maybe I'll

be offered a publication, maybe I'll even be approached with a proposal for an anime adaptation!"

Talk about a humble-brag!

With that said, I'm currently peaking in life.

Check out new chapters of *Saving 80K, Potions,* and the spinoff series *I Shall Survive Using Potions! Hanano and Lotte's Journey* on the webcomic magazine, *Suiyobi no Sirius* (https://seiga.nicovideo.jp/manga/official/w_sirius/).

My sincerest thanks to my editor, the illustrator, the cover designer, the proofreaders, the printers, publishers, distributors, sales staff, and of course, everyone who picked up this book.

Thank you so much!

I hope to see you again for the next volume…

FUNA

FUNA

Naval warfare! *Funadama* (ship spirits)!

In hopes of hindering the aggressive maritime nation, Mitsuha puts her wicked scheme into action!

Mitsuha: What?! But I saved them, didn't I?!

Colette: Huh? FUNA-dama?

No-o-o-o-o!

Illustrator

Keisuke Motoe

Saving 80,000 Gold the anime is now airing!

Mitsuha and her friends are moving and talking!

It's also available through web streaming. Hope you check it out!

Saving 80,000 Gold in Another World for My Retirement 7

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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