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THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE

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Prologue — In Another World for His First Weekend Off in Six Months

“Welcome, my groom. Allow me to first offer my apologies for bringing you to my palace without any prior warning. I hope such an action can be forgiven,” said a woman, smiling sweetly.

She was absolutely striking, with red hair and tawny skin.

“Um... what?”

The person she was addressing—a man by the name of Yamai Zenjirou—simply muttered a half-witted noise in response, completely unable to grasp the situation.

What on Earth’s going on? Zenjirou thought to himself. The last he remembered, it was a Saturday... One that he was, for once, not spending at work. He had woken up at his usual time to make sure that he got the most out of his day off—such days being a rare occurrence since he’d started working. He had gotten on his bike and ridden to the nearby convenience store to grab some breakfast. That much he remembered.

In fact, his backside was still atop the seat of his bike, and his hands were tightly gripping the handlebars. The basket on the front held a fried chicken meal that he’d heated up at the store, along with a half-liter bottle of chilled tea.

Zenjirou wasn’t sure if he was going crazy, so he reached out and checked the temperatures of both items. The food was hot, and the drink was cold. The realistic sensations made him feel more certain that this was no dream. It also let him know, seeing as the food had not yet cooled down nor the tea warmed up, that he had not, in fact, lost consciousness and had instead been moved somewhere instantaneously.

He’d been pedaling through Kanto in Japan until mere moments ago. How was he suddenly in some gloomy stone room, being smiled at by a beautiful

woman?

He observed the figure in front of him fixedly. She looked to be in her mid-twenties, he thought, though she had a stronger bearing and appeared calmer than most of that age, so she might be a little older. At the very least, it seemed she was older than Zenjirou's own twenty-four years of age.

She was wearing a sensuous red dress with a plunging neckline, opening up in a V down her chest, but her own form certainly didn't lose out to the eye-catching clothing. The valley of her breasts visible through that V boasted a chest more worthy of the moniker "huge breasts" than just simply "big ones," and her waist was as narrow as her chest was prominent.

The lines of her body from the waist down were hidden by the flowing skirt of her gown, so he couldn't tell for sure, but her legs were probably just as attractive. She had wide, almost square shoulders that some men might not find to their liking, but Zenjirou was well aware of her more womanly charms.

If he had been certain that he was currently dreaming, he would have leaped forward and yelled, "Where have you been all my life?!" That was how perfectly his type she was.

"Your Majesty, there is not much time. Now that the summoning has proven to be a success, it may be best to explain things as quickly as possible," a young man clad in leather armor suggested monotonously from the woman's side, while Zenjirou remained captivated by her beauty.

It was that statement that first made Zenjirou realize that he and the woman weren't alone in the room. He hurriedly surveyed his surroundings and saw four men outfitted in the same way, armed with spears, surrounding him as he sat on the bike. There was also an elderly man wearing purple robes and leaning on a long staff.

His failure to have noticed the others in the room wasn't because Zenjirou was unobservant. No, it was because the red-headed woman before him was just *that* imposing. Now that he looked at the armed men, he could see that they were well built and not exactly bad looking themselves, but when placed beside *her*, they were "extras to the queen" at best.

More than anything, this might all be thanks to what was termed "charisma,"

and as he considered that, the woman nodded slightly and looked him in the eye, addressing him.

“Very well. Now, my groom, I am sure you do not understand why you find yourself in a place like this. Would you permit me an explanation and an apology for these circumstances?”

“What? Ah, y-yeah,” Zenjirou nodded, more at the force behind her smile than in understanding of her words.

The woman’s smile deepened at his meek reply. “Good. In that case, a gloomy place such as this is ill-suited to a lengthy discussion. It would be best to change locales. I would like for you to follow me.”

With those words, the woman turned, sending her wavy red hair billowing around, and walked off.

“We shall take care of your vehicle here,” a guard said gruffly.

“Ah, y-yeah, thanks.”

Still completely at a loss, he swung himself off the bike, automatically put the kickstand down out of habit, and locked it with a key from his pocket before hurrying after the stunning stranger, who was now standing at the entrance and watching him over her shoulder.

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Zenjirou was guided down a long corridor with stone walls and floors, into a large room with bright sunlight streaming in. There were two big leather sofas and a long wooden table between them, set up to allow for a comfortable discussion.

Following her gesture, he sat on one sofa. Once she had seen him seated, she settled down on the couch opposite him and began to speak calmly.

“Let us begin with introductions. I am Aura Capua. I would like for you to call me Aura.”

“Ah, sure, Aura it is, ma’am. I’m, uh, my name’s Yamai Zenjirou. Yamai is my family name, and Zenjirou is my first name.”

“Hmm, then may I call you Sir Zenjirou?”

“Yes, okay,” he agreed, earning a smile from the woman—Aura.

“My thanks, Sir Zenjirou. Now, I shall inform you of what has been done to you, explaining the chain of events simply. It may well be that this explanation displeases you, but it is not too late for the changes to be reversed. Should the circumstances not be to your liking, I swear on my honor that all shall be reverted to what it was. Therefore, would you listen in silence for the moment?”

Her expression turned quite serious as she prefaced her explanation with that rather worrying assurance. Zenjirou had a bad feeling but nodded in assent after a brief moment of thought. He had no idea what sort of situation he was in. Supposing he had the right to be angry like she said, he couldn’t very well feel that way without understanding exactly what there was to be angry about. You could only put in a complaint after listening to everything your trade partner had to say, after all.

“I understand; please continue.”

Aura let out a sigh of relief at his answer before taking a deep breath and beginning her explanation. “My thanks. First, allow me to start with the fundamentals of where you are. This is the Kingdom of Capua, situated in the west of Randlion, also called the Southern Continent. This room itself is inside the royal palace, in the capital of that country. You may not know these names. That is only natural, as this is a different world from that in which you were raised—a ‘Parallel World,’ if you will.”

“Uh... huh? A parallel world?”

With a sideways glance at Zenjirou, taking in his utter incomprehension, Aura continued steadily. Her explanation continued for a good while. He didn’t know how long they sat there for, but when he’d glanced at his watch about halfway through, it had been half past seven, and the hands had made their way around to eight o’clock by the time they were finished.

Zenjirou worked through everything he had been told over the past hour or so, and summed it up dazedly. “Um... so, we’re in a country called the Capua Kingdom, in a parallel world, and you’re this country’s queen, milady? Also, this world has magic, and you used a type of magic only the Capua royal family can,

called ‘space-time magic,’ to summon me here from my own world.”

“Indeed, you are correct on all counts. It would seem you now understand what has happened. Also, you need not be so respectful with me. Titles and such are unnecessary; you may simply call me Aura. I am indeed this country’s queen, but you are not one of my subjects. In fact, I have taken you from your world without warning, and might well be as a tyrant to you. You have no current obligation to refer to me as such,” she said, giving a short, apologetic incline of her head.

“R-Right. Understood, Aura... ma’am,” Zenjirou replied, wrenching his eyes away from the glance he had stolen at Aura’s plentiful breasts when she bowed.

It was his inability to absorb her words that had caused such a simple explanation to take the better part of an hour. It was hardly surprising, though. Being summoned to another world was not exactly something the average human could easily accept as fact.

Aura hadn’t lost her temper at his disbelief; she’d simply continued to repeat the facts, politely but firmly. Thanks to her patience, Zenjirou had finally come to accept that he was truly in a parallel world.

The deciding factor had been the mount that a knight had brought over to the window at Aura’s order, a “dash drake.” The creature was a huge lizard, about twice the size of a horse. It had snaked its head in through the garden-side window and licked Zenjirou’s face. The warm, realistic sensation erased his doubts that this was a dream or some sort of elaborate prank.

His cheek was still damp from the dash drake’s grassy-smelling saliva. He wiped his face clean using his shirt sleeve, and voiced his doubts. “What I don’t understand is why you would summon someone like me.” He was just a normal Japanese guy with no particular skills. At the very least, he didn’t think he held enough value for another world’s queen to go out of her way to summon him. “What is it you actually want from me? I’m not proud of it, but I can’t use a sword, or magic, either.”

Aura smiled at his careful admission, shaking her head. “I have no intention of asking you to face such dangers for me. This western part of the Southern Continent may well have had a long history of war, but it is relatively peaceful

nowadays. There is only one thing that I wish to ask of you. And that is for you to become my spouse."

"Spouse?" he parroted uncomprehendingly, unable to divine the intention behind her words.

"Indeed, my spouse. You could also use the word 'husband.' I am asking you to marry me."

Spouse, husband, marriage. Even Zenjirou, with his brain as frazzled as it was, could understand that.

"What?! M-M-M-Marry you? Why?!" he cried, leaping to his feet.

She seemed to have expected that response, as she simply chuckled and continued calmly, "This conversation may take a while, but please listen to what I have to say. As I explained earlier, our country was previously embroiled in a long conflict. Fortunately, we emerged as one of the winners of that conflict, but the price was steep. The population decreased, our lands were ravaged, and the royal line has died out but for myself.

"Blessedly, the ceaseless efforts of the nation and its people make our prospects better than they would otherwise be, but there is still the issue of the royal family. I am the only member, and the bloodline may soon die out. It is therefore my absolute duty to marry.

"However, the space-time magic inherent to my family is linked to our bloodline, so I cannot marry just anyone. To safeguard the magic, it would be best to partner with someone else who carries that bloodline."

"Right, I see..." he murmured instinctively, even though he didn't really see at all. He'd heard of the custom on Earth for royals to marry as closely as possible in order to maintain the purity of their bloodlines. And this world had a clear benefit in the form of inherent magic, so it was even more understandable.

But in that case, he felt that he understood even less. "Why me, then? I'm from Earth—I don't know the first thing about magic," he said frankly.

"The reasoning is simple. You carry the blood of the Capua family," she answered, smiling meaningfully.

“I... what?”

Once more, he simply couldn’t grasp her meaning. It took more than ten seconds for him to unpack those words. Once he did manage to process them, he started waving his arms around like a broken puppet, disputing her claim.

“Wait, wait, wait, what the hell?! No, that’s not possible!” he denied profusely, but Aura merely pressed on.

“It happened five generations before me, about one hundred and fifty years ago. It has been removed even from the royal histories, so I myself do not know the full details, but I heard that it started when the first prince of our country fell in love with someone he would not ordinarily be able to marry. It is said that she was either a commoner or a member of an enemy nation’s royalty, but the truth is unknown.

“Regardless, the prince fell in love with someone he would not be allowed to marry, given his position as heir to the throne, and despite the objections from his parents, the king and queen, would not be swayed. So the lovers, who would never be able to marry in *this world*, left for another world where they could be together. It sounds rather romantic, don’t you think?”

At this point, Zenjirou could guess the rest of what Aura was planning to say. “You’re trying to tell me... that I’m descended from them?”

“Precisely,” she answered, maintaining her smile at his incredulity. “I did not simply perform a random summoning and hope for the best. I specifically aimed to summon a man with strong enough ties to the Capua bloodline. And you were the one who appeared. Therefore, I am quite certain that you are indeed their descendent.”

Even while a corner of his mind accepted her statements, he still had objections. “But that’s absurd. Actually, even if it were true, it was five generations ago, right?! That’d make them my, um... great-great-great-grandfather and stuff. So wouldn’t I only have inherited a tiny part of that bloodline?”

“Indeed, I was in fact prepared for such an event. However, the blood of our royal family runs rather deeply within you. While not to the same extent as a member of the main line, it would be considered exceptional for a cadet

branch. Enough so that, with training, you may well become capable of space-time magic yourself," she informed him with a slight nod.

"Y-You can tell that?" he asked, collapsing back into his seat at her earnestness.

"I can. Not whether you have the blood of royalty, but any mage can sense the latent mana potential of a person. You have a rather significant amount, Sir Zenjirou, almost to the level of royalty. There is no doubt that my summoning magic responded to the blood of the Capua running through your veins, and I would speculate that your mana levels are related to the strength of your inheritance. A pleasant miscalculation, I believe you could call it. It is almost as if the people who traveled to your world married closely to maintain the bloodline."

"Ah, right! That... might make sense, actually," Zenjirou exclaimed with a sudden realization prompted by her words.

"You have some inkling as to why this may be?" Aura asked, looking at him thoughtfully.

"Ah, I do. My family actually hails from a historically insular village. They used to only have one or two people marry into the village from outside each generation."

Zenjirou had grown to dislike the unchanging, insular nature of the sticks and had gone to university in the Kanto region, found work, and started a new life in the city. But this whole discussion did remind him that many of the people of that village, including his parents before they died in a car accident during his middle school years, were rather dark-skinned for Japanese people, with redder hair than was usual as well. Zenjirou himself, in fact, had swarthy skin for a Japanese person, and his hair was a reddish-brown, just bordering on black.

Aura placed a hand to her mouth and nodded in understanding. "I see, so the isolation of the village prevented the royal bloodline from dispersing throughout that world."

"I think so," he agreed. "It makes sense, at least."

For real? I'm not actually completely Japanese? I'm mostly from another

world? I didn't have a clue about that! he thought to himself, keeping a tight smile on his face as he was assailed by panic. It did make sense. Too much sense.

In contrast to Zenjirou's strained expression at the discovery of an unexpected ancestral secret, Aura's smile widened happily as she drew closer to him. "You are indeed the partner I desire. So, Sir Zenjirou, though you may be confused by the sudden nature of these events, would you consider living in this world and becoming my husband?"

Aura's face turned serious, and Zenjirou calmed down a little as well as he began to think it over. Getting married to the beauty sitting before him was in and of itself not a bad proposition. As mentioned before, she was exactly Zenjirou's type. Their conversation thus far seemed to imply that she had a good personality as well. Of course, being a monarch required the ability to present yourself a certain way, so judging her personality from the conversation alone was dangerous.

There was another problem, though. Aura's suggestion was not for her to marry him, but for him to marry her. If Zenjirou agreed, he would be bidding farewell to Earth. However much to his liking the woman before him was, that didn't mean he could readily abandon his job, friends, pleasures, and those cuisines that he could only enjoy back home.

Zenjirou's mind was moving sluggishly, still thinking that all this might be a dream, and he didn't answer immediately. After a moment, he realized that he hadn't even touched on the most important issue yet.

"U-Um. I'm already here anyway, but what if, and this is only hypothetical, mind you, but what if I refuse? What happens then?" he asked hesitantly, his fear obvious at a glance.

She answered with a reassuring smile to put him at ease as his face paled. "In that case, as I bear the responsibility, I shall use unsummoning magic and return you to your world. I said as much initially, did I not? I believe my words were, 'Should the circumstances not be to your liking, I swear on my honor that all shall be reverted to what it was.' After all, I was the one to drag you into this world regardless of your wishes. If I am rejected, please rest assured that I shall

at least wipe the slate clean. You should simply follow your heart and answer as you will."

"Ah, r-right..." he let out a sigh of almost anticlimactic relief and leaned back into the sofa, his shirt clinging unpleasantly to his skin. He must have become drenched in sweat without even realizing it.

In many instances where people were summoned to parallel worlds in manga and novels, the summoner often couldn't return them home, so the subject of the ritual normally had the choice forced upon them. It appeared, however, that Zenjirou would not be faced with such extremes. Whatever else may happen, it was fortunate that he *could* return if he wished. The revelation calmed his churning thoughts.

"Additionally, even if you choose to accept, I intend to briefly return you to your world first. If you are to part with your home, there will be people there that you must bid farewell to. Transferal magic is influenced by the alignment of the stars. It cannot be used freely at any time, but fortunately, the positions of the stars will be correct until tomorrow night. After that, the stars will be suitable for summoning again after one month.

"In essence, should you refuse, you will be returned home and that shall be the end of it. Should you accept, you will temporarily return home tomorrow, and I shall summon you once more a month hence."

"Wow, you can use it that frequently?"

"No, we are merely blessed with a special alignment in the stars right now. After this month, the next opportunity will not be until thirty years have passed. There is no need to worry about it too much, but it is not the most convenient of circumstances."

"What, no way, thirty years?!" Zenjirou sputtered, losing all semblance of formality at her answer.

That was way too long, and meant that he'd certainly be saying goodbye to Earth for good if he accepted. However, knowing that he could refuse and could return to his original world was a great help to Zenjirou's current mental state. A person's mind was a strange thing... If they were told it was impossible, they would want to go home more than anything, but if told they *could* return,

they'd start to wonder if they really had to.

If everything she said is true, then it's a pretty sweet deal. I mean, I've got no family, no girlfriend. Work's... Well, it's going, but I can't say I'm that attached to the hundred and fifty hours of overtime every month.

Now that he actually thought about it, today was the first Saturday he'd had off in half a year. Weekdays frequently had him getting home after midnight, Saturdays were workdays as a matter of course, and about three Sundays per month were as well. The one saving grace was that the company *did* pay all the overtime worked, but he never had any chance to *use* that money. By the time he got home, he didn't even have the energy to cook for himself, so his dinners on weekdays were either boxed meals from a convenience store or eaten while he was out.

Actually, it's probably been just as long since I've talked to a woman outside of shopping or work, he thought. *So, yeah, it's not like I'm that attached to my life back home...*

In his homeworld, he had no partner, and nothing but days full of work awaited him. In this world, an easy life and a marriage to a big-breasted beauty. When comparing the two options, his present situation could well be called "striking gold," couldn't it?

Those thoughts rushed through Zenjirou's mind in an instant, but his inherent wariness put the brakes on just as quickly. *Whoa, whoa, hold up. Even if everything she's said so far is true, there must be a catch. She's a queen, right? There have to be responsibilities that go along with marrying a queen.*

Royalty were political families from birth. You often saw hedonistic princes in novels and manga, but they were a small exception, and he'd heard that most royals were busy enough that he, as a working man, could sympathize with them. If that's what he'd be stuck with, he would probably be better off with the openly exploitative nature of his current office job.

Zenjirou took several discreet breaths and calmed his urge to decide immediately. "Umm, if I were to accept, what would my responsibilities be? A queen's husband is still a type of royal, right?"

Aura smiled widely at the question, taking it as a good sign. "Nothing in

particular," she answered. "At any rate, I am the thirty-second ruler of the country, but in the history of the Capua Kingdom, I am only the third queen. My two predecessors both remained single for their entire lives, and the line of succession went through adoption to a child of a cadet branch with strong blood ties, and to a younger brother, who was still an infant when his sister took the throne, in those cases. In other words, Sir Zenjirou, you will be the first to marry a queen in this country's history."

Aura was speaking as if he had already accepted, but Zenjirou currently lacked the composure to notice it. There was something else that he needed to comment on even more.

"W-Wait a minute! Are you telling me that the rights and responsibilities of a prince consort aren't defined at all here?" A prince consort was the queen's spouse, though the word might not exist in this country, considering such a situation was unprecedented.

She nodded calmly in response to his flustered question. "Indeed, so the writings say. But rest assured, as you may infer from the fact that only three of the thirty-two rulers this country has had were female, we are generally a patriarchal society. Regardless of how things are in the workplace, the man is the head of the house, and it is a virtue of a woman to treat her husband with respect. Whatever form it may take, I pledge to make our marriage meet your desires to the best of my abilities."

"R-Right..." Zenjirou stammered mindlessly at the sweet words that had just left her mouth. Her answer was far better than he'd expected, so that was the most coherent response he could manage at the moment.

If he took her words at face value, then not only would he have no further responsibilities, but Aura would do her utmost to accommodate him as well. This was way too good to be true. Even in his woolly-minded state, Zenjirou couldn't accept it without question. It was far too convenient.

No, think it through. There's got to be an ulterior motive here, he thought frantically in the face of those amazing conditions. They were so good that they made him want to leap into it feet-first. *Besides, what does she get out of this? Continuing her bloodline? Is that really all?*

Yes, if every other member of the royal family had died, Zenjirou's strong ties would be awfully attractive. If that was the case, though, would she make it such a favorable opportunity? A family head that did nothing but procreate. Men like that were called "spongers."

If she's making *her husband a sponger, maybe she's got a thing for layabouts? No, no way...*

If that wasn't the case, there must be some other significant gain for her to be making this proposal. If not, she wouldn't have immediately started with such an enticing offer, no matter how fitting Zenjirou was in regards to bloodlines.

No, I need more information. Zenjirou remembered one of the seniors at work giving him some bitter advice. *"If you push a deal through without knowing it back-to-front, it'll bite you in the ass."*

So he asked her another question. "Sorry to drag the topic back up again, but what will you do if I refuse? I can't imagine you won't marry, ma'am?"

"Well, in that case, I would probably invite a noble in the country with relatively strong blood ties to be my groom. Well, I say 'strong,' but they don't amount to much. That's why I went out of my way to summon you," she said with a self-deprecating smile.

Right, so she has candidates in the country as well. I suppose that's obvious. Hm... Wait a minute. Maybe... Let's ask something a bit leading, he thought, another possibility coming to mind. He swallowed subtly so that Aura wouldn't notice, and asked his next question in as calm a voice as he could manage.

"Would said candidates be those with grandparents in the royal family?"

Aura didn't notice the leading nature of the question and simply gave a wry smile as she shook her head. "Hardly. There is no one with such strong ties to the family remaining. The closest are examples where their great-grandfather's grandfather or, even better, their great-grandfather's mother was in the royal family."

Aha, bingo! he mentally yelled, hiding his surprise behind a winning poker face. His superior in the company had told him, *"In business, it's important that it's conscious thought that controls your expressions, not your emotions."* That

advice held true even in another world.

Her answer was clearly strange. To show it numerically, the case with the great-grandfather's grandfather would mean they were five generations removed from the royal family, and four in the case with the great-grandfather's mother.

On the other hand, there was Zenjirou's ancestor, who was five generations removed from Aura. If, as she had said, there were survivors who were four generations removed, then there would be no reason to summon Zenjirou, who was five generations removed himself.

The village he had been raised in was insular, so he may have had very strong ties to the bloodline, but Aura couldn't have known that before the summoning. She'd actually called it a "pleasant miscalculation."

So, that would mean her explanation of needing to summon a groom from another world in order to bear an heir was a lie.

Then why did she summon me? Was the whole thing about wanting to marry me a trick? No, if I start doubting that, there'll be no end to it.

Zenjirou had no way of getting back to his world on his own. With that in mind, there was no need for Aura to manipulate him with honeyed words. She could just lie and tell him that there was no way home. She was probably trying to negotiate as faithfully as she could.

In which case, I can consider both her wanting to marry me and the favorable conditions to be facts. It fits better, too. So then, why? Why would she gamble and summon a descendent of royalty that fled to another world, and *give such a good deal on top of it?*

"Sir Zenjirou, are you well?"

"Ah, sorry. I was just thinking. So, if I were to marry you, what would you ideally want me to do? I don't mean legally, just what you personally would want from me."

"Nothing in particular," she answered pleasantly with a slight shrug. "Asking you to accept all this is also asking you to give up your home, your family, your whole life from before now. I am not shameless enough to request even more

of you, all things considered. All I wish is your aid in producing an heir to the throne."

It seemed the only real expectation would be for him to have a child with the buxom beauty before him. At least, she seemed to be earnest enough when she stated that.

"I... see..." he mumbled.

Her words were once again honeyed enough to drive a man to damnation. This time, though, Zenjirou had been prepared for her answer.

I'm right, then? Those conditions weren't just a sweet deal to entice me but were exactly what she wanted to begin with?

He mentally sorted through the information he'd acquired so far.

There were nobles with stronger ties to the royal family than the descendant of the runaway prince.

Regardless, Aura had still taken a gamble by summoning said descendant (Zenjirou) as her groom.

It turned out that he had rather strong ties to the bloodline, but that was merely "a pleasant miscalculation."

She told him that other than having a child with her, he could do what he wanted.

The country was a patriarchal society, and queens were a rarity.

Culturally, the husband was always the head of the family, and it was seen as a woman's virtue to treat her husband with respect.

The few prior queens had all remained single, and this would be the first time a "prince consort" would exist in the country.

From their conversation so far, he had seen her overwhelming charisma and she seemed well qualified to be sovereign of the nation.

He continued his questioning to prove his hypothesis. "Just two more questions, please. If I moved here, where would I live?"

"Most likely within the inner palace. Historically, the king would usually take

several women as his queen and concubines, so while it may be a little irregular, we would live in the inner palace."

As he'd thought. There was little room left for doubt. He gulped and made his final query. "Then, one last question. If I shut myself up in the inner palace after we marry and have little contact with the outside world or anyone related to the palace other than you, and just spend my days lazing around, what would you think of that?"

Aura seemed unable to bear Zenjirou's suggestion and broke into the widest smile of the day so far. "I would be most happy with that!"

That was when Zenjirou was sure he was correct on all fronts. *Right, it's all making sense. She isn't just baiting me with the chance to do nothing. She actually wants a husband who* won't *do anything.* A literal sponger would, in fact, be her ideal choice.

Giving it some further thought, it wasn't all that strange. His mistake was weighing everything against the values gained from spending his days working for the almost-sweatshop that his current employer ran. His job tired him out, so being given food, clothes, a home, and a hot wife was an attractive proposition for Zenjirou, but that wouldn't be the prevailing view in this world.

Work for a prince consort would be nothing more than exercising his authority. Men who were uninterested in doing so would be in the minority. Even if that authority wasn't stipulated in the local laws, a prince consort here would gain that power. The country's very culture was focused on men, and the head of the household would be the man. Even if that man had married into the family.

If a virtue of a wife was to support her husband as much as she could, that meant the prince consort could use the fact that he was the "patriarch" to give orders to the queen herself. At the very least, if the consort were to voice an opinion in public, the queen would be unable to ignore it.

Right, a nobleman would desire power, so if they became consort, in the worst case, they might usurp her authority. And even if they didn't go that far, they'd definitely work for their own family's gain first and foremost.

It would create a dual-layered system of power. And if the worst should come

to pass, it could divide the country and cause a civil war.

Yeah, so it makes sense she'd want to summon a groom from another world. There's no guarantee they wouldn't have political aspirations, but they at least wouldn't be pulling strings for their own family. It's worth it to her even if it only ensures they won't use their power for their own relatives.

If you perused historical texts, you would see a great number of cases where the monarch's spouse's family created major issues for the country.

Aura watched him as he thought it over and asked his questions. And once she judged that he had worked through things a bit, she spoke again.

"I am aware that asking for an immediate decision on such a life-altering choice is absurd. However, as I explained earlier, the summoning magic is dependent on the stars, so we have little time. You need not answer right now, but do I ask that you make your choice by tomorrow morning.

"This has all been brought about due to my own circumstances. I swear, again, that should you refuse, no harm will befall you, and should you accept, I shall attend you as your wife as faithfully as I am able to. What are your thoughts, Sir Zenjirou?" she entreated him with a gentle smile and a solemn gaze. Actually, the word "solicited" might be more appropriate, given the context.

"Right, well..." Zenjirou said, closing his eyes and turning everything over in his mind. If his thoughts and the hypothesis he now had were correct, this was a really good deal for him. But, as Aura herself had noted, he would have to leave behind his life on Earth. He wasn't perfect, but Yamai Zenjirou had supported himself until now, had his own morals, and lived according to them.

His job was certainly tough, and he'd often been on the verge of resigning, but he'd lived self-sufficiently so far and was proud of it. You could call that pride his "dignity" as a man.

If he were to accept her offer, it would mean throwing that dignity away and living off a woman's support. Could he do that? Was Yamai Zenjirou's dignity something he could discard so trivially?

If I think about it calmly, I don't need to worry about it at all, he mused to

himself. This wasn't something he needed to spend the night fretting over. He'd long since come to a conclusion.

Steeling himself, Zenjirou opened his eyes and looked into Aura's reddish-brown ones.

"Let's get married!" he declared, leaning over the table.

Yes, Yamai Zenjirou's "manly dignity" could indeed be discarded that trivially.



Intermission 1 — The Queen's Private Discussion

Later that night, after the summoning of Yamai Zenjirou, Queen Aura I of the Capua Kingdom held an informal meeting with her most trusted advisers.

A candlestick atop the table lit the room with a dim glow. Aura crossed her legs where she sat in a wicker chair fitting for the southern climate. She looked around at her gathered confidants and began to speak.

"So, how is he settling in?" she asked, addressing an attendant with long blonde hair.

"He finally fell asleep a few moments ago, madam," the woman answered in a clear, high pitched voice.

"I see. Good. However, he is something of a night bird. It may be best to prepare more lighting for the inner palace," Aura murmured, resting her chin on her folded arms in thought.

Zenjirou might have been more reluctant to accept her proposal if he had heard that evaluation. The time was only ten o'clock. Zenjirou's normal weekdays had him getting home around midnight or even later, so this was actually a very early night for him.

He'd purposefully put the lights around the room out and gotten into bed, despite the fact that he did not yet feel tired. It was more out of consideration for the maids who would be unable to stop their work until he turned in. That being considered late, or him being seen as a night bird, would make him feel a little awkward.

It was no wonder, though. In modern Japan, you could keep the lights on twenty-four seven if you felt like it. Here, you had torches, candles, lamps... things that were lit by flames, so nighttime would of course be seen in a fundamentally different way.

There was an exceedingly small variety of establishments that were open at night. Even the palace, usually a hive of activity, had an ingrained view that "*the*

night is for sleeping.”

“In any case,” said a slender-faced man from where he stood in front of her, “my congratulations on your engagement, Your Majesty. What is your estimation of Sir Zenjirou?” The speaker was a middle-aged fellow and looked to be some sort of official. He was Fabio Deubashe, Aura’s secretary.

A secretary would not ordinarily hold so much influence, but the queen currently had no prime minister or marshal. The army and government were under her direct control, so his position as “the queen’s right hand” meant that he had much more power than his title indicated.

The queen shrugged at her trusted confidant’s words and answered bluntly. “He was a far sharper individual than I anticipated. He kept a cool head and showed a fair amount of courage. This could be called an ‘unpleasant miscalculation,’ I suppose.”

Her judgment of him had sounded like praise at first, but calling it an “unpleasant miscalculation” was proof that she didn’t want a particularly competent husband. Aura’s ideal groom was a man who would surrender himself to extravagance and be satisfied with the money, women, and gourmet food—a man who held no political ambitions whatsoever.

“Particularly with his last question, I believe he deduced my intentions. Despite this, he was willing to accept the marriage,” Aura noted with a chuckle. He’d even directly asked her, *“If I shut myself up in the inner palace after we marry and have little contact with the outside world or anyone related to the palace other than you, and just spend my days lazing around, what would you think of that?”*

It implied that he was completely aware of what she wanted her husband to do, or rather, what she would want him *not* to do.

“I originally thought him to have been raised as a common villager, but given his intelligence, it’s possible for him to be a noble in his world,” she added.

“It certainly seems plausible.”

“I have my doubts about his manners and behavior, but he certainly doesn’t appear to be an ignorant commoner.”

Her confidants nodded in agreement; he wasn't quite the useless hedonist they had been hoping for. At this point, they too were applying the values of their own world to the newcomer. And in this world, education was a right afforded to royalty, nobles, and some particularly rich families.

As far as they were concerned, the majority of commoners were illiterate and uneducated, for better or worse. If you looked over the entire Southern Continent, there were certainly facilities that could open doors for commoners, but Aura and her confidants were unable to imagine a country like Japan where there were nine years of compulsory education for *all* citizens.

"In that case, it would seem likely that he has some ulterior motive for accepting your offer. If you decide to annul the arrangement, we will simply cancel the resummoning next month," offered the aged man who had stood at her left when Zenjirou was first brought over. He wore purple robes and was the court mage, Espiridion.

Aura let out a dismissive sniff and waved her hand. "Don't make me laugh, old man. Besides, who would you have me marry instead? The hungry wolf of the Guillén family, or perhaps the puppet of the Márquez family? We just lived through a war—such decisions would see the Capua Kingdom fall to internal strife."

The old mage gave a pained smile at her harsh censure, stroking his long, ashen beard as he supported the men in question.

"Your majesty, I feel that is excessive. Sir Pujol of the Guillén family is a great commander, and Lord Raffaello of the Márquez family is an extremely talented official."

"I am fully aware of their positions. I am the one who gave them those positions. However talented they may be, a man of unlimited ambition or a boy who jumps at his family's every demand are unsuitable candidates to be my groom."

Her estimations of the men were harsh, but by no means incorrect, so the aged mage said nothing more.

"Then you shall indeed wed Sir Zenjirou?" asked Fabio.

“I shall,” she confirmed with a simple nod. “I may have concerns about his intelligence being greater than expected, but he passes in regards to his personality. At the very least, there is no comparison to ‘the hungry wolf’ or ‘the family’s marionette.’ Much of the royal family’s blood runs in his veins. So much so that even he himself may be able to use space-time magic in addition to ensuring that his children inherit at least the basics of it.

“In that case, even the nobles should have no legitimate objections.”

Succession in the Capua royal family was legitimized by inheritance of the magic inherent in their bloodline, the space-time magic. So that made Zenjirou eminently suitable to marry the queen. The number of inherent magic users itself contributed to the country’s strength. If Zenjirou developed the ability to use space-time magic in the not-too-distant future, there could be no outright resistance to their marriage.

“However, he is from another world entirely, not just of a different social standing. Even if you marry, I believe there may be multiple problems with his ability to build a family,” Espiridion counseled, concerned about what the future might hold.

Aura laughed back meaningfully. “Well, that would be a problem regardless of who I marry. It is all a matter of my sincerity and effort afterward. As I told him this afternoon, this is all for my own convenience. As long as it is not a thoughtless demand that would impact national politics, I will accept any request from him.”

The sincerity she had shown during her discussion with Zenjirou earlier was no mere façade. Emotionally, she felt indebted to him after dragging him into this situation arbitrarily, and logically, it also made sense to treat the man who would become her husband in good faith.

A husband wasn’t a subordinate, he was family. If things went well, he would be a companion who she would share her life with for decades to come, skin meeting skin on many occasions. A quarrel would just exhaust them.

“Understood. That is a ‘family’ matter, so I shall leave it to you, Your Majesty. However, the heir, or lack thereof, is a matter for the kingdom. So if the worst should come to pass, and there is some incompatibility in ‘matters of the night,’

please report it immediately. It is fortunate indeed that Sir Zenjirou has strong enough ties that we can expect him to acquire space-time magic. There are several women with ties to the royal family as strong Lord Raffaello and Sir Pujol's that currently reside within the kingdom."

This frank, extremely rude statement came from Fabio. Until now, the only person capable of space-time magic had been Aura, so her bearing a child was the best proposition for the kingdom. But with Zenjirou's arrival, there was now a man with strong enough blood ties to potentially use the magic himself, albeit not as well. This presented the extreme possibility that the precedent set by previous queens might be maintained, with Aura remaining single and the heir being a child born of Zenjirou and a noblewoman who possessed some relation to the royal family.

The queen's marriage would always cause a conflict between law and culture: "the monarch reigns supreme" versus "the man is the head of the family."

If they knew about Zenjirou, there would be many noblewomen with ties to the royal line who would use that as a pretense to annul the marriage between him and the queen, and change it to a marriage between Zenjirou and themselves. In a way, the newcomer was both an opportunity and an explosion waiting to happen.

Queen Aura showed no anger at her confidant's bluntness and crossed her legs once more as she sat upon her chair, letting out another meaningful laugh.

"Indeed, a problem for the future, but one I have already considered to an extent. I believe your concerns are unwarranted. Child-making should go well."

"Oh? May I ask what gives you such confidence?" the mage asked with great curiosity.

She smiled back at him and answered. "A simple matter of biology. I took my dinner tonight across the table from my groom, but his gaze was quite clearly focused on my chest. He may have intended to hide it, but it was without a doubt a carnal gaze. It would appear that my body will suffice to stimulate his libido." As she spoke, she thrust out those sizable breasts proudly.

What was a glance for a man was an examination for a woman, and Zenjirou's wicked thoughts had been laid bare before the queen.

Chapter 1 — A Temporary Return

The next day, Zenjirou awoke in a guest room in the palace. His bleary eyes were filled with the sight of a luxurious canopy over the bed.

He started at the unfamiliar view, but his memories from the prior night soon came rushing back, reminding him of where he'd gone to bed, and he relaxed.

"Oh, right... This is another world, yeah," he mumbled to himself.

Zenjirou climbed down from the bed, which seemed bigger than his entire apartment back home, and stepped onto the carpeted floor. He donned a pair of slippers that were waiting for him and walked across the wide room before realizing he'd been scratching at his side.

"Argh, the bugs have gotten me everywhere. I kinda jumped in and agreed to the marriage yesterday, but maybe that was a bit hasty..." he muttered, a bit after the fact.

A single day had made him well aware of how uncomfortable this world could be compared to modern Japan. However well seasoned the food had been yesterday, the water and booze with it had been strangely lukewarm.

Zenjirou didn't have a refined enough palate to distinguish standard and low-malt beers but proclaimed like any proud Japanese that "ice-cold low-malt is justice." So the lukewarm wines served with dinner the night before were unbearably bad, regardless of how they tasted.

Speaking of warmth, the actual temperature was a problem as well. His impressions from Aura the day before led him to believe that the Capua Kingdom was a rather warm place, even compared to Kanto in Japan. It was extremely rare to see people walking the streets in long sleeves, even during the coolest time of the year. During the warmer seasons, temperatures rose well above normal body temperature, so people would pack themselves into small rooms and "enjoy the coolness" of each other's bodies.

Actually, he thought as his face twisted slightly, *I remember hearing some*

similar things about summers in India.

Thermometers didn't exist here, so he wasn't sure of the exact numbers, but it sounded like he could expect winters with lows of 20°C, and summers with highs of over 40°C.

Furthermore, this world obviously had no air conditioning. Zenjirou had only ever experienced summers with that luxury available, so the heat would probably be a formidable hurdle. It had actually stopped him from sleeping well at night. They weren't even at the height of summer yet, but it had still taken him more than an hour of tossing and turning in the king size bed to drift off.

Of course, the heat wasn't the only reason for his poor rest. The other issue interfering with a good night's sleep had been the *bugs*. This world seemed to have no such thing as glass window panes, and the windows were covered with wooden shutters instead. These shutters were left open during the day to let light in, and the bugs essentially had free rein to enter. The canopy seemed to act as something of a mosquito net, but it wasn't perfect and couldn't keep them all out, so when he woke up that morning, he found himself all but eaten alive.

What got to Zenjirou more than all of those problems put together, however, was the inconvenience of the night itself. He'd honestly never thought that a night without electricity would be such an ordeal. The dining room he had eaten in with Aura had been fairly well lit by many candles in a chandelier, but when he walked along the corridors later on, all he'd had to rely on was the oil lamp the maid guiding him had been carrying.

Even in his room, the only source of light had been a single oil lamp on the desk.

"I knew people used to go to sleep early in the old days, but now I get it. I mean, you can't do anything *but* sleep at night like this."

He got himself changed as the litany of complaints continued to pour from his lips. He'd refused the customary dressing aid provided in palaces and estates the night before. His current outfit was a pair of loose pants that fastened with a string at his waist, and a baggy, knee-length top that was almost like a nightgown. Apparently, these were what royals and nobles alike used for

nightclothes, but having tried them, Zenjirou would take a T-shirt and boxers any day of the week. These items were less comfortable to sleep in, and considering he didn't rest as well here to begin with, he'd gotten tangled in the nightgown with all his tossing and turning.

Yes, this *was* the royal palace, and even if it wasn't official yet, Zenjirou would be the prince consort. The food, clothing, and accommodations would all be of the highest quality, but they couldn't even satisfy someone who had grown up as an ordinary commoner in modern Japan.

The gulf between eras, and indeed cultures, was vast.

Once he had changed out of his borrowed pajamas into his own familiar clothing, Zenjirou sat on the edge of the bed and waited for the maid to come and fetch him.

"Thinking about it, Japan's pretty blessed. Most houses have a fridge and air conditioning. They don't even have electricity here. It'd still be nice not working, though. And the queen is super pretty."

The attraction for Zenjirou, even after the warm booze, uncomfortable room, and dark night, was the beguiling Aura Capua, who he was now, albeit informally, engaged to. She had joined him at dinner wearing an evening dress with a daring slit. Her charming smile and sensuous body had once more mesmerized her fiancée from another world.

Zenjirou had been charmed by her audacious figure and directed his gaze, though with enough moderation to not seem unnatural (or so he believed) at the valley of her voluptuous breasts and towards the slit where her thighs were visible.

Even considering it now, that ass, along with those breasts and thighs, seemed plenty enough reason to abandon his modern life back home.

"Actually, my bike came with me when I arrived. So I should be able to bring some other things back with me in a month, right? Okay! I'll write up a list of necessities for this marriage once I get back home!" Zenjirou said, clapping his hands together. At the same time, there was a knock on the door.

"Yes?" he called.

“Excuse me, but breakfast is ready,” came a familiar young woman’s voice from the other side.

“Right, I’m on my way!” he answered loudly.

Zenjirou stood and jogged over to the room’s entrance.

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Yamai Zenjirou was a special guest to the Capua Kingdom, but his presence was also top secret and known only to Queen Aura and her confidants. Because of that, all three meals, yesterday’s lunch and dinner, and now today’s breakfast, had been conducted with only his fiancée joining him at the table.

To describe the country with Zenjirou’s meager vocabulary, “it was like a combination of a typical fantasy kingdom based on the European middle ages and an untamed southern land.”

Amazingly enough, the long dining table was a single huge log that had been split down the middle, with the top polished to a sheen. The table could have easily seated thirty people if needed.

Zenjirou couldn’t even imagine how old the tree must have been. Using a single log like this would probably cost even more than a marble slab. The huge table had silver bowls filled with soup and a basket piled with buns. Chatting amicably with Aura, he began to eat the very foreign-feeling breakfast.

“The preparations for your return are complete. The stars will remain in alignment well into the afternoon, so the choice of when you return is yours. Please inform us of the most convenient time for you,” Aura told him once she’d finished wiping the bottom of her bowl with a chunk of bread, daintily placing it within her mouth and slowly chewing it. Her voice was as calm as ever.

Zenjirou, on the other hand, had no way of knowing this world’s standard table etiquette, so he took the bowl in his left hand, mimicking the way Aura had eaten, then used a silver spoon to carry a mouthful of the amber liquid carefully up to his mouth.

Aura wasn’t the kind of person to be overly fastidious about manners in a private setting such as this, but as her spouse, he would have opportunities to

sit down to formal meals in the future. She was happy to see him making an effort to learn the correct manners, and swallowed her suggestion not to worry about it and eat as he wished, simply smiling back at him instead.

"Thank you, ma'am," he said. "Let's see... I can leave at any time. I do have one thing I wanted to ask, though. How much can I bring between worlds with the transferal magic?"

"Hm? Fundamentally, summoning magic is for transferring people, so it should only be able to bring a person and what they can reasonably carry. The strange contraption you happened to be riding is probably the limit."

Aura's answer dashed his hopes, and Zenjirou slumped down in his seat. "Ahh, really? Man, I can't bring much then..."

"Was there something in my palace that caught your eye?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, no," he said, quickly correcting her misunderstanding with a wave of his hand. "I don't mean 'to take with me.' I'm talking about when I'm summoned back in a month. I'd wanted to bring several things from my own world..."

"Oh, I see," she nodded.

Aura knew that he must have led a very different lifestyle in the other world, and would have assets there that he valued. If he was a noble or wealthy individual there, it was hardly surprising that he'd have more than an armful of items he wanted to keep.

"That would indeed be something to consider in your position. Let me think..." The queen had always intended to meet his desires to the best of her ability, and therefore tried to come up with a solution. "Ah, yes. That may be suitable..." She brought her hands together, having thought of an idea after racking her brain for a moment.

"So, there *is* a way?" Zenjirou asked, half rising from his seat with a joyous expression.

Aura gave him a nod as she answered. "Indeed. There is a tool in the form of a carpet that is imbued with the fundamentals of space-time magic, which is called boundary magic. When you return to your own world, take it with you. If

you then create the boundary just before you are to be summoned a month later, the contents should be brought along with you. That is to say, whatever fits within the bounds of the carpet. You may not be able to bring all of your riches, but it is far better than having nothing, no?”

“I should be able to bring plenty with that! Although, I might have the potential but I don’t actually know the first thing about magic right now...”

Aura smiled reassuringly at him as his mood swung from one extreme to another. “Worry not. Magic tools activate with a simple influx of mana. If in the worst case you cannot do that, you need merely drip a small amount of blood onto the carpet. Blood has a high concentration of mana.”

Her reply made his expression swing back to joyful. “Even I should be able to manage that! Thank you for everything, ma’am.”

“You need not thank me. It is a trifle compared to everything you are offering me,” she replied with a composed smile.

Zenjirou didn’t know the value of a magic tool here and could only take her kindness at face value. If he had known its actual cost, he would have far better understood just how well she was treating him.

Magic tools were made with bestowal magic, which was like space-time magic in that only one particular royal family could use it. Such abilities were referred to as inherent magic. Zenjirou, of course, had no way of knowing that there were very few items made using that kind of magic, or that their prices were therefore sky-high.

And that was to say nothing of the small amount of space-time magic that was also within the carpet. In essence, the item was a confluence of two royal families’ specialties, proof of the friendship between the Capuan royals and those who possessed bestowal magic. It was, without exaggeration, a national treasure.

It was at this point that Aura seemed to have a realization as she added nonchalantly to her earlier words, “At any rate, I am glad it makes you happy. Is there anything else you desire? You are to become my husband; there is no need to be reserved at this juncture,” she said softly, slaking her thirst with some diluted citrus juice, having finished her breakfast at some point shortly

before.

Zenjirou lifted a metal cup of the same drink to his mouth and luxuriated in the sharp sweetness passing down his throat—while thinking that it would be just perfect if it were to be chilled by an ice cube beforehand—then replied after some thought.

“Let’s see... Well, there’s nothing partic— Actually, we’re engaged and we’re going to get married. In that case, do you have a ring that fits your left ring finger? I’d like to borrow one if you do,” he suggested.

Zenjirou associated engagements and marriages with a wedding ring, although the concept of engagement and wedding rings might not exist in this world, as Aura was looking at him quizzically.

“Hmm, I should be able to find one rather quickly if I look. What do you need it for?”

“It’s, well... something to look forward to in a month,” he answered evasively, with a smile.

If she didn’t know of the custom then he’d prefer to keep it a secret and give it to her as a surprise. Then again, even if she was unaware of the custom, with the combination of “lend me a ring that fits” and it being “something to look forward to next month,” it was rather easy to surmise that he wanted to give her a ring from his own world.

Aura gave him a strange smile, one that, although it was given with feeling, had no air of temptation within it as she looked him in the eyes and nodded once. “Very well, I shall look forward to it. I assume I can also expect to find out what significance a ring on the left hand holds in your world in a month?”

“Ah... yeah, definitely,” he replied, returning a strained smile as he realized his plan had almost certainly been seen through.

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The first transference had been over before he’d even noticed, but the second left Zenjirou a bit unsteady on his feet.

“Whoops...” he said as he stumbled forward.

He shook his head to get rid of the sensation of his vision warping and looked around. The road was paved with asphalt, and there were countless cars driving along it. Both sides of the road were lined with concrete apartment buildings.

The familiar sights and the stench of exhaust fumes made him truly feel that he had come home. Then again, the lack of change in scenery from the previous day made him wonder if the entire experience hadn't merely been a vivid daydream.

But... he had proof. He had left on his bike but was now on foot and carrying a rolled-up carpet in both hands. There was also the golden ring that he'd received from Aura, which was currently on his left pinky finger. This physical evidence set his mind at ease and confirmed that it had indeed been real.

"It felt like it happened so fast, just one thing after another, but I was there for more than a day, wasn't I?" he muttered to himself, losing confidence in his own sensations partway through.

He'd spent more than a day and night in the other world and assumed that it was simply Sunday now, but there was no guarantee that time moved the same way in both worlds. It might still be Saturday, or several days might have gone by.

Well, there were no significant changes that he could see around him, and the temperature and angle of the sun were much the same, so it should be fine. Then again, he wasn't *sure*.

"Crap, I need to check first," he mumbled with a shudder as his thoughts ran away from him.

He hurried home, still clutching the carpet.

"Phew, looks like it *was* about the same amount of time," he sighed in relief.

He'd returned to his apartment, a single occupancy affair that was about ten square meters, and checked the date and time on his LCD clock. The clock in question and his watch both showed the same thing, so it seemed that time was synchronized between the two worlds.

That was a relief to him. It had been a passing thought, but if time in each

world moved at different rates, Zenjirou's plan would have been fundamentally flawed. After all, the date of his resummoning was in thirty days *their* time, so if there had been a real difference, he wouldn't have been able to get everything done while worrying about when he would actually be summoned. And in that case, bringing his own things into that world would have been a pipe dream.

It was therefore with a much brighter expression that Zenjirou sat down in front of his computer and switched it on, his greatest fear assuaged.

"Right, I don't have much time, so let's get to it," he urged himself, slapping his cheeks to rev himself up.

It was a little past 10 AM, and his room had filled with the early summer heat and humidity. Still sitting in his desk chair, he used the remote for the AC and lowered its temperature to 20°C.

"Finally..." he breathed with a sigh as the mechanical chill of wind blasted across him. He wiped his sweaty palms on his pants and put his right hand on the mouse.

A month seemed like a long time, but it was deceptively short. It was the same period of time during which you would make an appointment with a client, gather the necessary materials for the presentation, and the deadline would be on you before you knew it.

Zenjirou didn't want to waste a single second, so he opened a search engine and put every keyword he could think of into it.

"Ah, damn it! Guess I'm screwed," he complained less than a hour later, scratching his head as he stared at the collection of open tabs he'd accumulated.

One of the few benefits of such a small room was the fact that in the short space of time during which he'd been on his computer, the temperature had dropped significantly and he'd just bumped it back up to 25°C.

With the room now artificially cooled, he rocked in his chair as if tormenting the cheap rug beneath while muttering to himself, "You know, even when something as unrealistic as an alternate world turns up, reality itself sure is

cruel...”

During his two days in that world, the things he’d missed most were his electrical appliances. Air conditioners, fridges, lights, and so on... Not a single one of them would work without a constant supply of electricity. Therefore, Zenjirou’s first goal had been to acquire a small residential generator. Of course, as one might expect, there wasn’t anything he could take that would provide decades’ worth of electricity so simply.

“The easiest option would be a diesel or gas generator. But then there’s the fuel...”

Such generators were sold for camping, so they didn’t take a lot of effort to set up and would supply him with power without much difficulty. However, they ran on specific fuels like gasoline or diesel. He’d heard about people making their own biodiesel before and had looked into it himself, but it didn’t seem like something that could simply be replicated by a layperson like him in another world.

Broadly speaking, such fuel required vegetable oil, methanol, and lye. Among those, the only thing that would be easily available in the other world was vegetable oil. Zenjirou would have to make the methanol and lye himself. He thought it might be possible to create methanol by distilling the wood vinegar produced when making charcoal, and the lye was doable if he had an ion exchange membrane splitting a salt-water tank with an electricity supply, but both would be far too much for him to manage on his own.

Of course, there was the option of running to a pharmacy and buying ethanol and lye in bulk, but it would be quicker to just buy the fuel itself from a gas station and store it in jerry cans. With the limited amount of cans he could fit on the carpet, though, he wouldn’t have power for more than a month. And the same held true for taking the methanol and lye himself.

“Guess combustion’s a no-go. So that leaves wind or solar, then?”

Wind power was fairly realistic. There was certainly wind in the other world, after all. But his worry was that the output would be unstable. He’d literally be leaving it to chance, so a calm and humid night would be unbearable.

Solar power was obviously out of the question with one of his main goals

being nighttime lighting. Lights that you could only use during the day weren't half as appealing. There were some that had large batteries, but those were consumables with minuscule lifespans. They wouldn't be reliable as a long-term power supply.

"There're also the hybrid wind and solar generators that are getting popular now. I guess they might work," he mused, sipping at his tea for a moment before returning his attention to the computer.

Thinking things over, a hybrid system of that sort would probably be the safest best. The manufacturer's site boasted, "Easy to set up, done in half a day, use it the same day." If he could trust the sales pitch, he should be able to set it up on his own in the other world without much hassle.

But his attention now was drawn to yet another system he had found by chance while scouring the web.

"A residential hydroelectric generator? I didn't know those even existed," he murmured, enraptured by the idea.

Unlike wind and solar panels, they required specific locations and therefore weren't as widespread, but home generators were indeed starting to trend towards water power. The "Small Residential Hydroelectric Generator" that Zenjirou discovered could be found in two versions, a 0.5 kW or a 1.0 kW unit, and used a differential in water to generate electricity.

From his research, generators that produced less than 10 kW were classified as "general electronics" and could be purchased relatively easily by even an ordinary household if they were in the right place. Of course, there were laws like the Waterways Act and other formalities that he'd have to navigate for purchase and installation, so it wasn't as easy to obtain as a fuel generator that he could simply pick up from a local hardware store.

Its main attractions were without a doubt its ability to operate constantly and the output being far more efficient than other options. With wind and solar generators, it was hard to produce enough power for a normal household even under the best possible conditions, but that wasn't the case with hydro generation. If he could expect the same performance as the manufacturer's specs in the catalog, then even the smaller model came close to meeting all of

his consumption needs. That meant he would be able to simultaneously use all the appliances that were currently in his room, including the air conditioner, fridge, computer, and so on without a problem.

But even the tempting hydroelectric generator had its issues.

“I wonder if there’s even a river or canal near the palace?”

Zenjirou hadn’t had a chance to step out onto the grounds during his stay. Not knowing if there was a water source suitable for the generator was a fundamental problem. Logic dictated that there would have to be a water source given the hundreds of people who were living in the palace, but on the other hand, there was also magic in that world. The possibility of being told, “Yes, water is created each day by a mage who specializes in doing so” was by no means nonexistent. He considered buying both the water and hybrid generators for a moment, but his budget wouldn’t allow for it.

Zenjirou had worked for a company whose one saving grace was properly paying overtime, so his savings stood at just over three million yen. That wasn’t bad at all considering he was still in his early twenties, but it couldn’t be called plentiful when taking his current goal into account. The hybrid generator he had narrowed his choices down to cost about five hundred thousand yen, and the hydroelectric generator cost a cool one and a half million.

There were many other things that he wanted to spend his money on as well, like a large air conditioner, a fridge, proper lighting, and so on. When he factored in underwear, toothbrushes, soap, towels, bath towels, and gauze handkerchiefs in place of tissues, it quickly became an insane amount of money. And once he added in a wedding ring for Aura, spending two-thirds of his budget on only the generators was impractical.

Until he’d settled on a generator, however, he couldn’t choose which appliances to take.

“Argh, I guess I’ve got to just pick one or the other. Do I go with the safe bet but low output, or the high output but with a risk of nothing? Hmm...”

It was a difficult question to answer immediately, but he didn’t have tons of time to spend on it. It wasn’t like buying meat and vegetables from a supermarket. It was a product that would take some time to deliver, and he’d

need additional time to learn how to set it up and use it.

“Actually, will they even sell it to me if I request only the generator to set up on my own?”

Zenjirou let out a brief sigh, having come across a fundamental problem with his plans. The information he had read earlier stated that the safety issues weren’t the responsibility of the buyer but of the company that installed it. So would that mean the possibility of them actually selling him the generator was a long shot?

After a bit more research, Zenjirou found some awfully inconvenient information.

“Yeah, figures. All the companies have mandatory consultations, surveys, and price quotes for installation before they’ll even sell hydroelectric generators,” he mumbled, slumping down with a sigh in front of his computer. He could probably assume they wouldn’t sell him the generator unless he had a set location for it, and that was on top of the required consultations and surveys. Apparently, he couldn’t just buy one in a single easy step.

“So, basically I’d need to get them to install it in some river, watch and learn how to do it myself, and then secretly take it apart and bring it with me to the other world?”

As the words left his lips, he remembered the village he’d been raised in.

“There’s that old hut in the mountains. I’m pretty sure there was a quick-flowing river by it. I should still own that bit of land, right?”

If Zenjirou remembered correctly, the small mountain hut, even more isolated than the village—which itself deserved a “very rural” designation—belonged to the Yamai family. When he had graduated university and decided to find work in the city, he’d signed the main properties, the fields, and house away to his aunt and uncle, who had taken care of him, but the hut and the area around it were still under his name.

Perhaps fortunately, the rundown shack had no electricity and was little more than a storage shed. If he said that he wanted the generator installed in the nearby brook, with electricity running to the hut, there should be no reason for

anyone to doubt him.

Either way, there was no time like the present, and time itself was his most precious resource right now. Zenjirou quickly picked up his phone and called the company selling the micro-hydroelectric generators. The call connected after three rings, but the voice on the other end was recorded—an answering machine.

“Good day! You have reached the sales and executive offices of Technotek PLC. We are currently unable to take your call. If you would like...”

“Ah, yeah, it’s Sunday. Obviously, they’re not in,” he said with a groan as he hung up. “Oh well, I’ll just send them an email. I’ll link the address to my phone and computer, just to be safe.”

He turned back to his PC and started typing out an email with the subject heading, “Purchase Inquiry.”

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The next day, a Monday, found Yamai Zenjirou heading to work and offering his letter of resignation. He stood there meekly as his boss looked it over with a hard-to-read expression on his face.

“You’re leaving...?” he asked shortly, looking bitter.

Zenjirou gave a deep bow of his head. “I am. I’m sorry.”

Working conditions were tough at the company, so it wasn’t rare for people to resign. Zenjirou had worked there for several years, though, and had recently become a “valued employee,” only to now resign. His boss couldn’t simply tell him to do as he liked the way he did with newer staff.

The wrinkles on the older man’s face, along with his thinning hair and protruding stomach, gave him the stereotypical image of a middle-aged boss. Still seated, he glared steadily at Zenjirou.

“You’re going home to take over the family business, then. Didn’t you choose this line of work because you hated that lifestyle?” he frowned as he skimmed over what Zenjirou had listed as his reasons for leaving.

The letter Zenjirou had given his boss was the result of him wracking his mind

the previous night to create a story that would allow him to quit smoothly.

“Yes, well. I had a bit of a change of heart, I suppose,” he answered humbly, feeling a cold sweat down his back. He could hardly write something like, “I’m going to marry a queen in another world and live off her,” so he’d had no choice but to lie about his reasons for leaving.

“Hmm... Well, I can’t force you to stay if you want to resign. You wouldn’t put in enough effort. Fine,” his boss said eventually, after a long period of glaring at Zenjirou, who let out a slight sigh of relief. Then, as if to rain on his parade, his boss continued loudly, “But I expect you to finish your short-term projects! Of course, I’ll transfer the longer-term ones to someone else. Oh, also, put together a handbook for whoever takes your place. I won’t tell you to write up something good enough to make them a pro, but I expect it to teach the newbies who don’t know their left from their right how to do things on a minimal level. All right?”

The man clearly wasn’t looking for an answer, so there was no point in refusing. Zenjirou was preparing to move to another world, so every second counted. He didn’t want to cause offense and leave a bad impression, and it would be far more of a hassle if his departure went poorly and his boss investigated more thoroughly, maybe even catching him in the lie.

“I understand; please excuse me,” he said, left with no choice but to work hard right up until the end.

Regardless of having given his notice, the task of creating that manual ultimately left him with less time than expected. Zenjirou didn’t feel like he could waste a single second, so at lunchtime he took a quick meal at a *gyudon* stall and then hurried over to a nearby jeweler.

“Right, this ring would be about a fourteen or fifteen, and your own ring size would be seventeen,” the middle-aged woman told him after measuring the ring and his finger, her service smile fixed in place.

This was the first time Zenjirou had ever set foot in a jewelry shop, so her comments didn’t really tell him if his or Aura’s fingers were particularly fat or slim.

The place was lit by a fancy chandelier, and the floor was covered with a short-pile carpet that looked brand new. There were also display windows showing off countless pieces of merchandise. Frankly, it wasn't an especially high-class shop, but he was unaware of the intricacies of jewelers and felt supremely out of place in his suit still reeking of *gyudon*.

"Right, I see," he answered, his demeanor indicating to the assistant that he was completely out of his depth.

She offered a straightforward explanation in response. "Your partner has a somewhat large ring size for a woman. There are only a few products that are quickly available in this size."

"Ah, well, height-wise she's taller than me," he said somewhat haltingly after the simpler explanation.

"Oh, my, and you're by no means short, either. In that case, a wider band would likely suit her better. Please wait here for a moment," she said, heading into the back to fetch some sample rings.

"Ah, right," he answered, naturally starting to think of Aura as she left.

The queen was solidly built, with a sensual body. Her face was strongly emotional, and her fiery red hair seemed to reflect her personality. Her skin was a natural light brown, different from skin that had tanned.

What kind of ring would look best on her hand? Zenjirou hadn't the slightest idea about precious metals, but the clerk's idea appeared to be right; a reserved ring didn't seem like it would suit her.

However, he was mistaken about one thing. She was not, in fact, taller than he. He was the taller of the two, although just barely. He was 172 cm in height, and she was probably about 170 cm. He'd thought she was in the latter half of the 170s, but that was nothing more than a misapprehension due to her overwhelming presence.

"Thank you for waiting. These rings can all be resized within a few days," the clerk said as she returned, showing him several options laid out on a tray.

"Oh, there's a fair selection," Zenjirou commented, but his gaze fell first to the price tags hanging from them.

He knew it was miserly, but he knew nothing of the quality of rings, so the biggest thing on his mind was the money leaving his wallet. Whether she knew his thoughts or not, the saleswoman launched into a practiced explanation of the wares.

“If you are unsure, I recommend starting with the metal of the head. Platinum is the norm for wedding rings in Japan, but with your skin tone, a gold might look better on your finger. If you feel that yellow gold is too gaudy then we also have rose gold rings. Of course, the most important thing is striking a balance with your fiancée’s ring.”

Usually, people with paler skin went for platinum and silver bands, but those with darker skin stuck with gold. Zenjirou, perhaps because of the blood of the otherworlders in his veins, had relatively dark skin for a Japanese person. Of course, Aura was completely of that ancestral stock, so her skin color was naturally a tawny brown.

“Right, she has even darker skin than me, sort of a light brown,” he said thoughtfully.

“In that case, I would recommend a yellow gold. For the stone, you might find a colorful ruby or sapphire more to your liking than a colorless diamond. Is she perhaps a foreigner?”

“Ah, yeah. She is. She’s not Japanese,” he answered vaguely, unable to tell her that his fiancée was actually a queen in another world.

“Overseas, people often choose a stone that matches their eyes or hair. If it matches, then it’s easier to get used to wearing, and it gives a message that you look at them often.”

“R-Right, I see,” he answered, just nodding along with her overwhelming sales pitch, still feeling ill at ease in a place such as this.

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An even busier afternoon of work awaited Zenjirou once he had finished his *gyudon* lunch and ring shopping. He returned his suit jacket to a hanger in his cubicle and quickly loosened his tie enough that he could get a hand between it and his neck. He also undid the top button of his short sleeve shirt and sat down

sloppily in his seat.

The company he worked for was taking part in the recent Cool Biz campaign, but being a smaller company meant that it wasn't applied perfectly. Zenjirou worked for the Service and Planning department, so in theory he would normally be working strictly within the company and should therefore be able to wear casual clothes. In reality, however, there was a high probability of him working outside of the office with sales, so he had to wear a suit to work just in case. Because of that, on days like this where he had no external business, there was tacit approval of him relaxing a bit and looking more a bit slovenly as he set about his work. Honestly, Zenjirou's approach was on the milder side, merely loosening his tie and undoing a button on his shirt. His direct superior, the section chief, would often have *no* tie, and even take off his shoes and socks to walk around in sandals.

"It's better than toughing it out and getting athlete's foot," he would excuse himself bluntly.

Zenjirou couldn't be so bold, though. He placed the half-liter bottle of tea next to his mouse pad as he woke the computer from sleep mode. The monitor lit up. It was a CRT screen, almost an antique these days.

"Right, back to it..."

He was currently working on the new employee manual that he'd been instructed to create this morning. There was no such thing as a job easy enough to do after reading through a single document, but his boss had told him to make something that could be a "light in the dark" for new hires.

"Not like *I* had one when I started," he muttered, halting his typing.

He didn't really have a tendency to engage in schadenfreude, but it felt a little unfair that whoever replaced him wouldn't have the same difficulties he had first faced... particularly when he was being made to create the document after he'd already given his notice.

Work was work, though, and he'd just have to do it properly so that he could resign in peace.

"Uhh, that about does it for the general stuff. Now..."

Having finished the outline for the “handbook,” Zenjirou stopped for a moment and took a gulp of tea.

As he clacked away at the keyboard, he referred to various documents for smaller details that he couldn’t remember, adding them in as he went along. He was essentially writing a summary of his three years of work there, so the majority of the details were stored on his computer.

Some things, however, were not on the computer or within his filing cabinet, so he had to go ask his coworkers. After about an hour of additional work, he couldn’t find what he needed on his hard drive, so he stood up and walked over to his superior.

“Excuse me, Yoshinaga, do you have the proposal from when we won the Yamaguchi contract two years ago?”

“Hm? The Yamaguchi one from two years ago?” asked the skinny man, stopping his typing and turning his head to look at Zenjirou over his chair. He was in his late thirties.

“Yes. You know, the one you took the lead on and I subbed in.”

“Hmm? Ah, yeah. Wait a bit, I’m busy at the moment. I’ll email it to you if I find it. You need it today?”

“Yes, please.”

“That reminds me,” Yoshinaga said as Zenjirou turned to leave, “I heard from the chief that you’re resigning?”

He hadn’t particularly intended to hide it but was surprised it had already gotten around, and gave a vague affirmative with a guilty smile.

“Huh, so you *are* leaving. You’ve had a lot of projects recently... Hopefully they won’t end up with me.”

“Yes, sorry. I’ll get them as finished as I can,” Zenjirou answered with a deep bow.

It occurred to him that his resignation was a completely different matter from a total newbie leaving. He’d become a real asset to the company somewhere along the way, so it meant that a lot of his work would now fall on someone

else’s shoulders. Well aware that his true reason for leaving was hardly something to be praised, he couldn’t help but feel somewhat guilty about that.

Chapter 2 — From Preparations to Transfer

After working right up until the last train, Zenjirou managed to make it to his studio apartment and went straight to his computer. Consciously ignoring the fatigue and weariness emanating from the very core of his body, he put the meat bun and bottle of tea on the left side of the desk and checked his inbox.

“Ugh... three years. 1,500,000 yen for three measly years...” he groaned, having skimmed over the email.

His grumbling was due to the reply from the domestic generator sales company. His inquiry the day before had mostly consisted of three questions:

“Is it possible to install the generator myself?”

“Can I perform the necessary maintenance on my own?”

“If so, how long is it guaranteed to work?”

The answers were:

“It is not. Installation requires an electrician’s license. Maintenance and safety is the company’s responsibility, not the purchaser’s, so please leave the installation to our professionals.”

“If you refer to the documentation you receive with the purchase, external maintenance like removal of pebbles from the water tank and keeping it moss-free is doable, but that is not covered by our warranty. If possible, we would prefer that you leave the maintenance to us as well.”

“The guaranteed lifespan is three years.”

Those heartless answers had crushed his hopes. He’d been relatively prepared for the replies about the installation and maintenance, so they didn’t affect him too badly, but the lifespan had completely thrown him for a loop.

“Three years, three measly years...” he muttered with empty eyes.

He had been prepared for that to a certain extent. Even if it had been a miraculous machine that would provide power for the rest of his life, the

essential appliances—the AC and fridge themselves—had finite lifespans of about ten years. But he had predicted he would be able to detach himself from the cultural conveniences and adjust to his new life there given sufficient time. So he had been thinking of those appliances as training wheels, to get him used to living in another world.

“In ten years, I’d probably adapt to the climate there, at least. I might even be able to get a room with water going down the walls like that old Maharaja’s palaces.”

This was something else he had learned while cruising the internet. Back before refined things like air conditioning existed, there’d been a Maharaja who had possessed great wealth in India, and he had used the huge, primitive system of having water flow down a wall, through drains on the floor, to cool the room.

Zenjirou stretched both arms up towards the ceiling. In principle, the custom of *uchimizu* in ancient Japan was the same thing. It used the endothermic nature of evaporation to cool the room. It seemed like a viable option, even with the limited construction methods available there. But even with his basic understanding of the process, he knew the cost would be nothing to sneeze at.

The kingdom had just gotten through a long period of unrest, and Aura had said they were in the middle of rebuilding. Would she allow the breeding stud calling himself her husband to waste so much money and manpower? They were unlikely to reach that point in only three years, but such luxuries might be more acceptable after ten years or so if the country recovered well. Or at least, that was his thinking.

“No way will three years work. The battery’s the problem, huh?” he mused, looking at his computer.

The consumable parts of a hydroelectric generator were the bearing (in the turbine) and the batteries. Obviously, the batteries were practically essential for any generator to stabilize the output, and they lasted about three years.

Fortunately, since they were considered consumables, even an amateur could change them, but that didn’t mean he could simply buy a bunch of spares and be all set. It wasn’t that the manufacturer wouldn’t sell them separately, either.

Hydroelectric power was a difficult enterprise in urban areas, so most buyers lived in the countryside where they couldn't easily ask the manufacturer for servicing. That meant it wasn't too unusual for them to buy a spare battery or two in case of some unforeseen accident, but they were just that: *spares*.

Batteries not in use would deteriorate far slower than those being run twenty-four seven, every day of the year, but they probably wouldn't be at full power after three years of amateur storage. To put it simply, could you expect batteries to perform on the same level after five or even ten years? That was an easier way of looking at it.

"I guess if I take three spares, it'll hold for a while. Man, I hope they last the full ten years. The bearing is guaranteed for ten, and it's hard to replace so I guess I don't need one? Well, most things only last about that long, so I might as well try some DIY repairs."

Even if he only got to enjoy the first few years with such conveniences, he didn't want to give up on the plan of taking some form of electricity with him.

Zenjirou had often watched TV and rented DVDs, but once he started work he was only ever able to record things and never got a chance to actually watch them, simply amassing a collection of discs burned from his recordings. He'd only seen the results of the African World Cup on the news, and had not seen any soccer from his favorite team in the J1 League or the European Championship in years.

He recorded two or three dramas with good reviews every year, and there was a show that an idol group broadcast every Sunday night at seven, but since he'd started work, they'd all come to be nothing more than unwatched archives. Not working, having all of his needs met, and just lazing around watching TV shows was an awfully unproductive use of time, but after the exhaustion from his recent work life, he could think of no greater pleasure. So much so that even that niggling voice in his head saying he would grow bored with such a life and be ashamed of himself couldn't dissuade him.

"I mean, I can only take what fits on the carpet, and yen will be useless there. Yeah, let's use it all!" he decided defiantly, starting to research all the appliances he wanted to take with him. "Right, I can probably manage setting

up the AC if I try hard enough... Wait, but where would I set up the vents? The walls looked like super thick marble... Besides, will a normal machine even work for that freaking enormous room? Will one be enough for forty square meters?”

Once he started thinking about it calmly, it seemed there were many obstacles to bringing electronics into another world. Regardless, Zenjirou put all of his efforts into gathering information that might make his life easier for even a single second longer there.

As he searched, he ate his lukewarm meat bun and drank his tea.

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Time flies when you’re busy.

When Zenjirou had been overwhelmed by work, he’d felt flustered and hopeless as the time seemed to slip away, but now that he was about to leave, he was grateful for how quickly the hours passed.

He left for work early, reading seinen manga on a crowded train. There were no morning briefings at the office, so once he clocked in, he headed straight for his desk and got right to it. The main focus of his work at the moment was collating all of the information so he could hand over his projects smoothly when he left.

Previously, his documents had only needed to be intelligible to Zenjirou himself, but now he needed to go through every paper and make sure that whoever stepped in could understand them. He also had to make the rounds, introducing his successors. He accompanied them to meet the clients and gave a deep bow, saying things like, “For personal reasons, I will be leaving the company. So-and-so here will be working with you in the future. Please treat them as you treated me...” and so on.

In between this and his usual duties, he continued to make the handbook for the new hires. Even chipping away at the mountain of work right up until the last train of the evening wasn’t enough, so he’d been turning up early to work overtime. However, he never stayed overnight. It was all to eke out even a little extra money for his trip.

In the past, when he missed the last train, he would stay over in a nearby

hotel, but he had to temporarily pay for it out of pocket. If he submitted the receipts to the accounting department, he would be reimbursed in the following month's paycheck, so it wasn't usually a problem. But it certainly was this time. After all, he'd be departing for another world before he got his final check, so even if they paid him back, it would go to waste. To avoid that, he decided to work overtime until just before the last train left and then continue working from the first train back the next morning.

It was worth it.

It had been three weeks since he'd tendered his resignation. He had been getting about four hours of sleep on average, and could now comfortably resign.

"Well, Chief, this is it. Thank you for everything," Zenjirou said, bidding a final farewell to his overweight boss.

"Yeah, be healthy," was the man's only reply. He stood and looked Zenjirou in the eye for a brief moment before sitting straight back down and returning to work like nothing had happened.

It was extremely blunt and might make others think that his boss hated him, but he understood how hard the guy was working and sympathized. Like most small-to medium-sized companies, the section chief wasn't strictly a managerial role. He was responsible for managing his subordinates, but he had even more to do than they did, and was a true contributing part of the workforce. While he may have technically been part of the management, he lost the option for overtime pay in exchange for that slight increase in wages. People in his position were usually called "chiefs in name only" and were subject to inspections.

This chief, however, had too much work, so in addition to his managerial duties, he had to do the same amount of regular work as his subordinates. It was a dark gray area; something that would be picked up on during an audit but was otherwise overlooked.

All Zenjirou could do was give the most respectful bow he could muster as his boss nobly faced his pile of responsibilities, still neck-deep in work even as

Zenjirou himself was about to escape that hell.

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After leaving for the last time, Zenjirou took his hybrid and drove for several hours, eventually reaching the village where he'd been born.

"Ugh... Ahh...!" he groaned, rolling the aches and pains from his stiff shoulders and neck as he climbed out of the car, dusk closing in.

The parking space that he rented near home was farther away than his usual convenience store and supermarket, so Zenjirou usually just rode his bicycle around the neighborhood or took the train to work. This was the first long drive that he'd taken in some time.

He lingered in the growing darkness and looked up at the two-story house, his gaze softening slightly. "It's just the same as ever around here."

The house was his uncle's family's place, and Zenjirou had come to consider it "home" after losing his parents during middle school.

"Right, let's go, then," he said, psyching himself up to overcome the awkwardness of having been away from home for so long as he pressed the bell.

"It's been a while, Zenjirou. I'm glad you're keeping well," Yamai Tadashi said. Zenjirou's uncle was exactly the same as he remembered: glasses, and a kind smile on his slender face as he welcomed his late brother's son.

The family consisted of four people: his aunt and uncle, their daughter, who was in her third year of high school, and their son, who was three years younger and in his third year of middle school. The daughter attended a high school that was a fair distance away, so she boarded there, and the gathering around the table currently consisted of his aunt, uncle, and younger cousin. Though only four people lived there now, there were five seats at the table.

The fifth seat was Zenjirou's. He had only lived there for a year and a half, from the time his parents passed away—during the summer of his second year of middle school—until he had entered the high school dorms. Yet his aunt and uncle still kept a seat at the table for him.

“Now then, let’s leave the catching up for later. Dinner first, dear,” urged his aunt, stepping into the room with a steaming pot.

She looked like the stereotypical “hard-working countrywoman,” and bade him sit when he tried to help, laying out the dinner with such efficiency that he couldn’t have offered much assistance anyway. When finished, she removed her apron and sat down in her own seat.

“Well then, dear,” she prompted her husband.

“Yes, let’s eat,” Tadashi agreed with a small nod, signaling the start of the meal.

The other three echoed the call and began their dinners.

As would be expected, almost all of the conversation that evening focused on Zenjirou.

“So, you’ve decided to go abroad?” his uncle asked, his glasses fogging up with steam from the food.

“Yes, I’m planning to leave in a little over a week. Sorry for the rush,” he answered with a bow, swallowing his aunt’s handmade pickled cabbage. He still had his chopsticks and teacup in his hands as he bowed.

His uncle gave a familiar, kind smile as he answered, “No, it’s fine. As long as you’re happy. Just remember that this is your home too, and you’ve always got somewhere to come back to.”

Tadashi’s gaze was warm as he looked at his nephew. He didn’t know, of course, that Zenjirou’s destination wasn’t a foreign country, but a foreign world.

“Ah, right, thank you,” Zenjirou managed. He couldn’t help but feel bad in the face of his uncle’s kindness, hiding as he was that he wouldn’t even be able to send a letter for at least thirty years once he left. He somewhat forcefully changed the topic, wanting to escape the guilt and avoid any issues with his claims coming to light. “Yes. I’m not sure exactly how long I’ll be away, but I won’t be back in Japan for a while. So I want to sign the car over to you, uncle, and let you have it.”

Tadashi frowned for the first time that night. “You know you don’t need to do that, right?”

Zenjirou had expected that answer from his good-natured uncle. He put his chopsticks down and waved a hand dismissively. “It’s not that... I just don’t want to scrap it. I’ll probably be gone long enough for my license to lapse, let alone make the next inspection,” he insisted.

Even hearing that, Tadashi was hesitant to accept. “Hmm, right. Why not sell it then?” he suggested, always trying to make things even a little better for his nephew.

Zenjirou realized once again just how caring his uncle was as he unconsciously continued to persuade him. “Nah, I can’t. I’ll be gone in ten days, so I won’t even have time to get a valuation.”

“I don’t mind selling it for you and putting the money into your account, then. You can withdraw it from abroad nowadays, right? And if not, you can always use it when you get back.”

Apparently, he was even more thoughtful than Zenjirou had realized, going above and beyond to avoid depriving him of any benefits to maintaining possession of his car. Despite being aware of this kindness, Zenjirou was abandoning his life here and getting married in another world for reasons that made him feel somewhat pathetic.

“No, I mean, it’d be second hand so it wouldn’t fetch much, and I figure it’ll be of more use here,” he said, somewhat stubbornly pushing the car onto his uncle to suppress his guilt.

Realizing how serious his nephew was being, Tadashi tried a different tack. “Hmm, but I already have a car, and a pickup, too,” he countered.

A car was essential in the countryside. Farmers also often had a pickup truck, which could be driven on a standard car license and was necessary for moving larger quantities of their products. There certainly wasn’t much benefit to owning yet another car at this point.

Zenjirou had expected that answer as well, though, and continued. “Right, but what about it being in your name and Sanae using it? She’s going to university

next year, isn't she? She can come back more often if she has a car."

Sanae was the name of his eldest cousin. The suggestion prompted his uncle's first pained smile of the day. "That might be true. And it's convincing coming from you."

There was a hint of recrimination in his statement. When Zenjirou was at university, he'd often given somewhat vague answers to his uncle's calls asking him to pop around once in a while, and hadn't been back once in four years.

"S-Sorry about that. But her first choice is in this prefecture, isn't it? I think it's different, then. It'll make a big difference."

"Well, that does make sense. But I don't know; cars are dangerous."

"So, Sis is gonna use Zen's car? Do you think she'll take me to Iida?" asked the son, breaking the silence after poking at his food for a bit. His father remained unsure.

"Come on, Yuusaku. We haven't decided yet, so don't butt in. Besides, Sanae won't have her license until next year, and you'll be in the dorms at high school then," he gently rebuked him, a slight frown on his face as the boy's eyes shone with excitement.

Of course, those words didn't make the energetic middle-schooler falter. "But... but... we'll both be back for the summer, right? I can ask her then, yeah?" he asked, clearly already assuming that Zenjirou's car would become Sanae's, or rather, the family's.

It wasn't uncommon for a high-schooler to not want their sister to take them anywhere, even the shopping district, but it seemed the two siblings still got on well. A heartfelt smile made its way onto Zenjirou's face at the insight into their family dynamics. He took a drink from the tea brewed by his aunt, and spoke to his younger cousin.

"I guess, if Sanae agrees. Why not ask her when she's back?"

"Yeah, I'll text her. Thanks for the food!"

"Hey, wait," Tadashi said, but he didn't have time to stop him. Yuusaku quickly piled all his tableware together and took it into the kitchen before

clattering off upstairs. He was probably going to text his sister right away.

“Yuusaku!” Tadashi yelled as he started to stand despite being in the middle of eating.

“C’mon, Uncle,” Zenjirou cut in. “Yuusaku’s excited about it, so why not just take it off my hands?”

Still, Tadashi seemed hesitant to accept his nephew’s offer and fell into a troubled silence.

“Why not, dear?” came the final push from his aunt, who had been watching their exchange silently until then. “Zenjirou’s already grown into a fine man. If you keep refusing his generous offer, it’s like you’re treating him as a child. Don’t you think that’s impolite?”

“I... see. Yes... you’re right,” his uncle gave in, accepting his wife’s advice and turning to his nephew with a calm expression. “Zenjirou.”

“Yes?”

“I’ll take you up on it, then. Thanks. I’ll tell Sanae to treat it well,” he said with a slight bow.

“Right. I’m sorry it’s a used car, but it’s a thank you for all your help over the years, so treat it like your own,” Zenjirou replied as a relieved smile made its way to his lips and he returned the bow.

After finishing dinner, Zenjirou went to bed. He’d once lived in the room for a year and a half, and it hadn’t changed at all since then. There was a desk in the corner, a chest of drawers next to it, and atop that was an old-fashioned radio that only played CDs.

The futon he’d laid out was the same as the one he had used back then as well.

“I guess this room’ll always be mine, however many years pass...” he muttered to himself as he sat cross-legged on the futon in his light blue pajamas, fiddling with his phone in one hand.

He’d never disliked his uncle, aunt, or cousins as they helped him through

middle school, high school, and then university, but they still weren't "family" to him, just "relatives." "Relatives" that he was as close to as family, who had helped him immensely, but that might not be how his uncle saw it.

"Man, guess I've got to pay them back at least a bit," he said, uncrossing his legs and flopping onto the mattress.

They'd kept the room ready and waiting so that he could come home any time, even though he'd already grown up and left. It was one of the luxuries allowed by the bigger houses in the countryside, but he couldn't ignore that it was simply another example of the family's kindness to him.

Zenjirou looked up at the ring-shaped fluorescent tube that lit the room and let out a sigh. As he did, the scent of insect repellent from the futon tickled his nose. It was strangely comforting to him. His futon didn't smell of him anymore, though, which was enough to act as proof that the room wasn't really his to come back to now.

"Either way, I guess I'm bidding the world farewell in ten days," he thought, still sprawled face up on the bed as he flipped his phone open to check the date.

Upon leaving his apartment he had canceled all of his utilities, including the landline, gas, electricity, water, and so on, but had arranged for his phone to be canceled only at the end of the month. It was paid straight from his bank account, where his final paycheck would be going next month, even after he was gone, so it would be covered without a problem. He felt it made more sense to keep using the phone up until the last moment, seeing as he could use it anywhere.

"It's too late for regrets at this point..." He had agreed to be resummoned by Queen Aura in ten days. Even if he changed his mind now, there was no way for him to convey it to her, so it was already settled. "And she said that repeated summonings and unsummonings so close together were an exception last time."

In ten days, once he was summoned back to the other world, the next chance he would have to return home would be in thirty years. It was a significant length of time, and he needed to be prepared to die there.

“And I am prepared for that... or I should be.”

Zenjirou put his phone next to his pillow and picked up a blue velvet box that was about the size of his palm. Inside it was a pair of rings. The golden bands had three colorless diamonds embedded within them. They weren’t as ostentatious as rings with protruding gems, but the wide bands had precise geometric designs cut around them, and the luster of the three diamonds in each were enough to charm anyone who saw them.

“Aura...” he murmured, thinking of the queen awaiting him. As he did, his attachment to this world, which had been strengthening since he’d met his relatives, finally started to fade. “It really was love at first sight... I guess.”

He still had some reservations, but sorted through those thoughts and sat up on the bed to turn the light off.

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The next day, after gratefully eating breakfast made by his aunt, he took off in his car and drove for about thirty minutes into the mountains, to a rundown hut.

He stopped his car on the mountain pass. The road was a bumpy path, covered in weeds apart from where tire tracks had flattened them. He climbed out of the car and was taken aback by the view of the hut.

“Whoa! I haven’t been here since elementary school. I don’t remember it being *this* small!” he exclaimed.

The hut was a tiny thing that barely kept out the wind and rain. It, and the surrounding land, belonged to Zenjirou.

When he had graduated and decided to find work near the capital, he’d essentially foisted the house and fields he’d inherited from his parents onto his uncle. Tadashi had already been looking after them anyway, but he’d refused to take ownership of the hut and its grounds. It was, after all, where the Yamai family history had started, he’d said.

The building now standing before him had a sheet metal roof, so it had probably been rebuilt since the Shōwa Era, but it was still a battered old shack.

“I wondered when she first told me the story if they had come here because they’d been ostracized. If Aura was right, that might be pretty spot on,” he murmured sentimentally as he looked at the hut bathed in morning sunlight.

If Aura’s assumptions were correct, then his ancestors, the forebears of the Yamai family, had come from another world. They had arrived here one hundred and fifty years ago after eloping.

A couple with what looked like a mix of Latino and South Asian features would have surely been conspicuous. They may well have had a difficult time of it until they could live peacefully away from others in this little hut.

“Well, there’s no folklore like that passed down through the generations in the village, so I guess they must have integrated pretty well,” he said, pulling his thoughts in a more positive direction from their current grave trajectory.

In such a small village, you’d normally still hear whispers about avoiding such a family, even after a century and a half, and he’d never heard of anything like that. There was a significant possibility that his current musings were correct.

As those thoughts were passing through his mind, Zenjirou heard the sound of a heavy diesel engine from down the weedy road.

“Oh, that must be them.”

He saw the truck through the trees and decided that he had better make space for them to pull in, so he quickly got into his car and moved it.

A few minutes later, the truck had stopped and several men wearing gray overalls climbed out.

“Sorry we’re late. We’re from Technotek’s construction and sales department. I assume you are Mr. Yamai, the one who ordered the micro-hydroelectric generator?” the oldest of the three asked as they stood in front of the ramshackle hut.

“Yes, that’s me. Thanks for coming out today.”

“And thank you for the business,” the middle-aged man replied with a smile. “We completed the preliminary survey a few days ago, so we should be able to

start the installation right away. But we'd like to confirm the requirements one more time, just in case. You want the generator set up in that river so you can have power in the building behind you, correct?"

"Yes, that's right," he replied. What he *actually* wanted was to be able to use it in a palace in another world, but there was no way he could tell them that. "But," he added, "I'm pretty far out in the country here and would like to be able to carry out the bare minimum of maintenance myself. Apologies if this is rude, but would it be possible to record it being installed?"

The engineer's lips twisted. "Hmm, I don't mind you recording, but maintenance, huh? Well, you should be able to empty the tanks of sand and clean the filters, but I don't think you should interfere too much with the generator itself."

"Of course, I just want to do what I can as an amateur," he lied.

"Okay, you can go ahead and record us, then," the engineer agreed.

"Thank you; please let me know if I get in your way," Zenjirou returned with a smile, going back to his car to pick up the Handycam he had borrowed from his uncle.

"Whoa... It's way harder than I thought. I might have underestimated things a bit..." Zenjirou muttered tiredly after several hours of recording.

The work had started at 10 AM and still hadn't finished by the afternoon. With three specialists taking so long, just how hard would it be for him to replicate the setup over there on his own?

"I might have jumped the gun a bit here..."

There was no shame in regretting his earlier decision. Apparently, the "simple setup" touted on the product page meant "provided you're a specialist."

The small generator had three main components. The first was a water tank to remove larger solids, to stabilize the water supply. Another was the generator itself, containing a large magnet and turbine, the core of the system. The last one centered around a replaceable battery that was part of a control system that stabilized the output.

The tank was installed upstream with a thick hose-like intake for water from the river to fill the tank. To get the greatest possible differential pressure in the water, the generator itself was placed at a much lower altitude.

The tank and generator were then connected by a long, thin hose with high durability and the water filtered by the tank flowed on to the generator. That water made the turbine spin in the generator and then left through the drain, ejected downstream.

The control system was installed in the hut. They drilled a hole through the walls and passed a cable that connected the system to the generator, letting the electricity created flow straight to the control system.

The control system itself incorporated two large batteries, and thanks to those batteries it was able to regulate, to a significant degree, the fluctuations in output that were characteristic of small generators.

Ordinarily, the control system would feed the electricity to the home's distribution board, but the battered old hut had no such thing. Because of that, he'd paid extra to have the control system fitted with several sockets so that he could power appliances directly from it. If he plugged the devices straight into those sockets, he could use a TV, computer, or fridge without issue.

"Wait a moment," said the lead engineer. He headed back to the truck and retrieved an old standing lamp, used as a final confirmation that the generator was working. "Right, let's get her running!" he called to his team from inside the hut, through the propped-open door.

The two younger engineers called back their confirmations after running final checks on both pieces of equipment and spinning their arms to show that all was well.

"The tank's fine!"

"No problems with the generator!"

The machine ground to life. The turbine spun, producing electricity, which was then immediately directed to the control system in the hut.

From the sound of it, a fan had started up somewhere in the oblong device, and a light on the upper-right shone green to indicate that it was functioning

normally.

“Right, let’s go, then,” said the senior engineer upon seeing the green light. He stood the lamp on the floor and plugged it into one of the sockets on the control panel. Then, he flicked the lamp’s switch. The bulb glowed brightly in the gloom of the hut.

“Whoa!” Zenjirou exclaimed in admiration.

“Looks like there are no problems,” the engineer said, smiling in accomplishment as he wiped the sweat from his brow with a towel that hung around his neck.

About an hour later, the truck from Technotek had left and Zenjirou was alone in the shabby hut, in front of the newly-installed control system.

“Right, that’s the biggest problem sorted,” he murmured.

The Handycam was currently charging from it, the indicator light on the camera glowing to show him that it was working just fine.

He peered at the control panel, the documentation the engineers had left gripped in one hand. “Okay, so this red light is an emergency lamp, and this number is how much power is currently being generated. That should be enough to run all the stuff I would use in an apartment. But even if I can set it up over there, there’s no guarantee it’ll generate the same amount of energy.”

The documents had a table of common ratings for household appliances. You could use it to tell at a glance roughly how much power would be needed to use any type of domestic electronic device.

The maximum output for Zenjirou’s generator was one kilowatt. That would be enough for a family of four or five to live on, let alone one person in a single room, but it was, in the end, nothing more than a theory. The gauge currently displayed a little over six hundred watts. Assuming he took it to the other world and got it working, it was highly unlikely that he’d manage to achieve better results than when it was installed by professionals.

“So, that means I’ll be limited to whatever I can run simultaneously,” he mused, glaring at the exposed beams in the ceiling. “Shall I get the stuff out of

storage and try it out? See how much it'll handle?"

And that's what he decided to do.

Either way, with the generator set up at the hut, it was likely that he'd have to depart from there. On his last day, he would stop the power and generator, get it all out and put it on the carpet. But the generator itself weighed 75 kilos.

With a cart, he could get it into his car, but it would be more efficient to just spread out the magic carpet and leave right from the hut. It would be difficult to get the generator from the riverbed into the rundown house, but not impossible.

"I'll need to bring everything here anyway, so I might as well do it now."

When he'd moved out, he'd put the things he was bringing with him into storage and gotten rid of the rest. All he had brought to the village was some hand luggage, clothing, the wedding rings, and the magic carpet. If he got in touch with the movers quickly and had everything transferred to the hut, he'd be able to get it all done without a rush.

He could also have a bit of fun testing out how many devices could be powered from the generator at once, simulating what he would need for a life away from civilization.

"I've still got a few days' leeway, so if I think of anything else I need, I can get it from the home center in the nearest town. I'll need to check how much money I've got left, too."

He may have called it "near" but the closest town was actually over two hours away, so he'd have to keep the trips back and forth to a minimum. He'd actually planned to help out his family with the farming until he left, but he'd just have to do half days instead of full ones. He was a grown man, so even if it was only for a few days, he wouldn't sit around doing nothing while they fed and housed him, but he did have his own timetable to consider.

"Right, better make the call straight away. Okay... wait, there's no signal out here? Man, I won't even be able to use my phone until I get onto the main roads."

His plans set, Zenjirou climbed aboard his now dusty, muddy silver car so that

he could go call the movers and the storage facility.

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The time to prepare had passed by in a flash. It had been exactly one month since his promise to Aura.

The shoddy metal structure was all but lost in the morning mist. Within, Zenjirou sat on the center of the carpet, which was covered in magical symbols, waiting for the moment to come. The sight inside the hut could be called nothing but “bizarre.”

He was dressed sharply, wearing a gray suit, with a huge mountain climber’s rucksack on his back. That was plenty odd in and of itself, but his right hand also held a box cutter with a bare blade, its point jabbed into his left pinky finger. “Odd” was a rather generous way of putting it.

“Any time now, yeah? No, maybe not... Maybe it was all a dream? No, no way, I’ve got the carpet and ring... But what if something unexpected happened and they canceled the summoning?”

He poked at the wound on his finger periodically, so that blood kept dripping gently onto the carpet as his worries rushed over him.

He had already made his preparations to leave. He’d quit his job, canceled his utilities, and moved out of his apartment. He could still use his mobile, but he’d already arranged for it to be cut off at the end of the month. He had lied to his last remaining relatives, telling them that he was going abroad for a career change. He’d even changed his residence certificate to be registered in his birth village rather than where he worked.

He had left his bank and postal accounts as they were, and would receive his final paycheck on the tenth of next month. He wouldn’t be able to use that money, of course. At least, he shouldn’t be. He would have real problems if he was still around by then.

With all these preparations in place, Zenjirou would be left adrift with an essentially worthless generator and a stupidly long extension cord if he ended up staying there. Frankly, he would be in a pretty tough spot if he wasn’t summoned after all.

“Crap, my head’s spinning. Did I lose too much blood?” he muttered, feeling his vision dimming. That was impossible, though; the amount of blood that he’d lost wasn’t a tenth of what they would take for a blood test at the hospital. The narrowing of his vision and his dizziness must all be in his head.

It was already early summer, but being by a river in the mountains meant that mornings still had rather low temperatures.

“I’m freezing...” he murmured. He didn’t know whether it was the nerves or the chill in the air that was making him shiver. “Have I forgotten anything? The generator... I’ve got the tank, the turbine, the control system. I’ve got the intake and drain hoses too. Right, got it all.”

He went again through all the parts of the most precious cargo he had—the micro-hydroelectric generator—to calm those nerves.

He had spent the entire day prior lugging them all onto the carpet with great effort. Moving the generator itself in particular was no small task. He wanted someone to praise him for it. He’d bought a cart at the home center just for that purpose, and he would never have managed without it.

The engineers had pounded wooden stakes into the leveled ground at the riverside to fix the rectangular machine in place. He’d had to painstakingly remove each of them and slip the cart underneath it. By the time he had managed that, his clothes had been soaked through, even the T-shirt and boxers he was wearing beneath his blue tracksuit.

His efforts were worth it, though, and he now had the whole generator arranged on top of the carpet. It was the biggest item he was taking after the five-compartment fridge.

“The only thing I ended up buying her other than the ring was booze. I guess that’s okay, though? She did seem to have a liking for drink, at least.”

An upper corner of the carpet was taken up by bottles of whiskey, brandy, and some sake and wine to top it off. His drink of choice was usually low-malt beer, cheaper (due to tax laws) as it was, or on very rare occasions, a bottle of 1,500-yen whiskey. A container costing ten or twenty thousand was absurd to him, but it *was* a gift for a queen, so he needed to be willing to splurge a bit.

Speaking of alcohol, Zenjirou seemed to remember that the drinks he'd been served there were mostly low-percentage, just weak fruit liquors. So he'd hurriedly bought a domestic still, although he hadn't attempted to actually make spirits with it yet. He figured it would be a good bargain if it worked. Either way, he'd bought familiar low-malt beer and local whiskeys by the crate, so it should be enough to last them a while.

He turned his gaze to his clothing. "This works... yeah. I mean, even if not, it's the best I have."

The gray suit that he was wearing was the most expensive of all his clothes. You could call them his "Sunday best." He was heading off to get married. There might be cultural differences, and she might be from another world, but he wanted to dress appropriately for the occasion, to the best of his ability.

He'd thought about getting a white suit like the bridegroom would wear at a reception, but had given up after seeing their ridiculous prices. It was more than anyone should spend on a set of clothing they would only wear once. The most that Zenjirou could do with his limited funds was pick out the best attire he already had and use that.

While thinking about his outfit, he realized that the belt on the rucksack was creasing his suit. "Ah, crap. Will I even be able to straighten it over there? I'm not brave enough to leave it behind, though. Guess I'll just make do."

The bag on his back contained a set of clothes along with sturdy walking boots. He also had rechargeable AA batteries and a solar charger for them. Besides that, he had hardtack, chocolate chip cookies, marbled chocolate, plastic water bottles, lighters, and multitools by the dozen, a hand-cranked LED flashlight, a thermal blanket, and so on. Essentially, an emergency kit that he could keep on hand.

Considering the possibility that something could go wrong with the summoning, or that the carpet might not work properly, leaving him with only what he had on his back, he refused to put the rucksack down even if it did crease his suit.

Of course, the most precious possession he was taking was, in a sense, the wedding ring for Aura. It was in his jacket pocket, within its box.

He suddenly felt the need to check on the ring again. Unfortunately, his right hand was currently occupied with the knife, and his left had blood dripping from the pinky. He was considering putting the knife down and looking through his pockets when it happened.

“Guh...?!”

He was assailed by a familiar sense of vertigo as he sat there on the carpet. He’d dropped the knife immediately and was holding himself up with both hands when there was a bang to his right and the voice of a woman he hadn’t heard in a month came to his ears.

“Welcome, my groom. I am pleased to see that the second summoning seems to have gone well. I can now greet you in the true sense of the word. Welcome to this world, and to our country. Be at home here, my lifelong partner.”

“Aura, ma’am...”

Everything had made the transfer successfully, carpet and all. Zenjirou forgot to even stand, looking up at the queen rather dopily, his hands on his knees as she spread her own arms in welcome.



Chapter 3 — Marriage, and Starting Married Life

About half an hour had passed since Yamai Zenjirou had safely made it to his new world. He had been escorted to the inner palace with only the clothes on his back. The soldiers were responsible for moving all of his luggage, which included everything on top of the magic carpet as well as the rucksack he'd had on his back.

It was a fairly transparent plan on their part, using the excuse of doing the heavy lifting in order to go through his belongings for security purposes. But Zenjirou knew that, in their position, it wasn't unreasonable, so he had no particular objections and entrusted it all to them.

He hadn't forgotten to point out the appliances—starting with the generator and following with the fridge, air conditioner, and floor lamps—stressing that they were fragile and that the soldiers would need to handle them very carefully.

"With so many bizarre items being brought into the palace, they'll want to check that none of them are dangerous," he muttered to himself as he sank into a polished wooden chair.

In the worst case scenario, they would determine that the electrical appliances were dangerous objects and dispose of them, but he was feeling relatively optimistic. He'd gotten at least some form of permission from their queen before bringing these items along. Even if something was mistakenly identified as a hazard, he would probably be given the chance to explain before any action was taken.

"I did try to leave behind anything that looked dangerous or shady. Then again, this *is* another world..."

He was still slightly uneasy about it all and let out a sigh, rising from his seat, then seemed to remember that he still had his jacket on. He took it off and lay it across the back of the chair. Then he put his finger through the knot in his tie and loosened around his throat before undoing the top button of his shirt.

“*Phew*...”

That was a bit better. This world really was hot. Japan had just entered early summer, so there were a few days with temperatures above 30°C, but it felt like the temperatures here had already reached what he’d normally experience in the middle of summer, around 35°C.

“I can survive this much, but I don’t know how I’ll cope if it gets any hotter.”

Dealing with the heat would have to be his top priority.

There was a knock at the door, followed by a voice. “Excuse me, Master Zenjirou.”

The voice was calm and that of a woman, and was unfamiliar to him. He started but managed to reply without betraying his surprise. “Yes?”

“I would like to introduce the maids who serve the inner palace to you. May I ask for a moment of your time?”

“Um...” Zenjirou hesitated but knew there was no real reason to refuse. His nervousness about the transition between worlds meant that he hadn’t noticed before, but he currently had more time than he knew what to do with. “Yes, come in,” he replied, reflexively standing up as he invited the maids in.

A large group of women entered the room at his invitation. Their outfits were much the same, barring some smaller details. The uniforms were based on a dark red and white scheme. They were very unusual uniforms for maids... as if someone had taken the native dress of places like India and the Middle East and made them short-sleeved with miniskirts.

The shawl-like cloths wrapped around their heads in particular brought the sari, the characteristic garment of India, to mind. Their clothing was refined enough to draw even Zenjirou’s notice, regardless of his general lack of familiarity with fashion.

The maids walked in and stood before him in three rows as if they’d choreographed it in advance. The farthest row back was made up of nine younger women, the second row had four women in their thirties and forties, and in front was a single lady who looked around forty years old, standing before him like their representative.

“Allow me to introduce the maids who will be attending to the main needs of your daily life. First, I am your head maid, Amanda, the leader of all servants within the inner palace. This will be where you reside, so should you find anything unsatisfactory, please make me aware.”

With those words, Amanda bowed politely. Her tone and general briskness gave her the air of a very capable woman. Though it wasn’t just her air, of course—a woman in charge of all services within the inner palace would have to be quite skilled.

Man, pointed glasses would really suit her, Zenjirou couldn’t help but think (rather rudely) to himself. She gave off an impression similar to a character from a shoujo manga that had come out long ago: a strict dorm manager.

“Nice to meet you, Amanda. I look forward to working together.”

Amanda’s lips moved as if she wanted to reply, but her expression soon returned to its serious state as she bowed her head again. “Indeed, Master Zenjirou.”

Zenjirou’s job had given him a certain proficiency in divining people’s feelings from their expressions, and he caught her reaction. *What? Was I too polite? I guess I* am *the lord here, and she’s a servant.*

Acting more humbly when you didn’t have a firm grasp of where your counterpart stood in relation to you was very much a Japanese phenomenon, but Zenjirou was about to be royalty in this world. Acting humble with the servants might cause some social discomfort.

Upon closer inspection, he could see that the maids behind Amanda were all wearing similar expressions of surprise and confusion. It seemed he had indeed chosen his words poorly. Was it because of the difference in position that they couldn’t simply tell him not to be so polite? He was from another world and utterly lost here. If the people around him didn’t point out his mistakes, he’d never be able to learn or integrate.

I guess I’ll consult Aura later, he thought as Amanda continued her introductions.

“I will now introduce the leaders of each department. This is Ines, who is in

charge of the cleaning staff."

"That would be me, sir," said one of the women in the second row, stepping forward and bowing deeply.

"Next to her is Vanessa. She is in charge of cooking for the inner palace."

"Pleased to meet you. I manage the kitchens."

"And next to *her*," Amanda continued, "is Emilia. She oversees the gardens."

"It's good to meet you, Master Zenjirou."

"Finally, we have Oraja, who is responsible for the baths."

"Greetings, Master Zenjirou, please let me know if you wish to use the baths at any time."

Concluding her first round of introductions, Amanda motioned to the women as a group. "These four are the department heads of the inner palace."

"We look forward to working for you," they said together, bowing perfectly in sync.

"Y-Yeah. Likewise... no, um... I hope... I *expect* the very best from you all," Zenjirou stammered, doing his best to avoid politeness and speaking down at them as well as he could manage.

Personally, he felt like he was putting on far too many airs and behaving laughably, but it seemed to be the correct course of action. The women were all visibly relieved as they bowed their heads in assent. Zenjirou was at his wit's end by the time he took in their expressions. *Ahh, looks like that was the right call. I'll have to ask Aura exactly how to interact with them later.*

Ignorant of his churning thoughts, Amanda continued.

"The nine in the back work underneath these four in whatever capacity is required. If you have any day-to-day requests, please direct them to maids themselves rather than going through me or the department heads. There are many others in charge of various groups, but these nine will always be around and awaiting your commands. Introduce yourselves, please."

The nine in the final row bowed and made their introductions one by one.

“I’m Carina. Please let me know if there is anything that you need.”

“I’m Kisha.”

“Crystal.”

“Kate.”

Zenjirou had a fairly average memory, and at this point he had reached his limit. He could maintain enough focus to put names to faces for the first five—the head maid and the department heads—but with nine more after that, it was time to raise the white flag.

“I’m Dolores. I shall carry out my work to the best of my abilities, Master Zenjirou.”

By the time they had cycled through their simple greetings, he had already given up on trying to remember them all. *It’s fine, we’ll be together in the inner palace, so I’ll eventually get all the names down whether I want to or not. I’ll just make a point to remember the head maid, department heads, and any other big shots for now.*

Back home, Zenjirou had done rather well even when away from his desk, so it wasn’t that he was bad with names and faces in general, but thirteen at once was a bit too much. He would have to learn the others’ names over time.

Still, though, he thought surreptitiously as he surveyed them, *they basically fit into two types here. Maybe that’s how they were recruited? You know... ability or looks.*

The crowd in front of him really did fit into those two groups. To put it bluntly, the categories he could see were “older women who weren’t so attractive” and “women who were young and attractive.”

It went without saying that Amanda and the four department heads were of the former type, and the nine behind them were of the latter.

Amanda and the woman in charge of cleaning, Ines, were still slender, but their three colleagues all had the paunch that was characteristic of middle age. In contrast, their nine subordinates had no such deficiencies in their figures. Zenjirou’s impression that it was perhaps a matter of looks versus ability might

not be far off base.

The nine general maids were all wonderfully diverse as well. If you could call one of them “cute,” then another would be better described as “beautiful.” Some of them were tall while others were short. Some had larger chests, and others were smaller built. It might have been a cultural thing, as only one of them had short hair, but there were a wide variety of hairstyles on display.

Overall, however, more of the women were tall, and the majority had bigger breasts. In that regard, seven of the nine had “huge breasts” and one among them stood out as having an even larger chest than the queen.

That’s right, Aura is taller and better endowed than the average woman in Japan. Maybe this world’s average height and breast size is just higher than back home? Zenjirou consciously kept his gaze upwards to avoid staring at their chests as he considered the situation.

The truth was somewhat different, though. The young maids had actually been chosen specially to his perceived liking, so that they would have no difficulty arousing his interest if he so desired. The taller girls were there because he had shown a strong interest in Aura, and the larger-chested girls had been chosen due to his gaze having focused on the queen’s breasts when they’d last met.

Essentially, his impression that they had been chosen for their looks was, on the whole, correct. But they had, at least, been chosen from a pool of women who had the skills to be maids within the inner palace.

Zenjirou had no way of knowing about those intricacies, however, and his head was currently filled with concerns related to his arrival, so he couldn’t fully admire the beauties before him.

“Got it, I expect good work from you all,” he said stiffly. At present, his mind was occupied with simply getting through the formalities safely.

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While Zenjirou was being confronted by the maids of the inner palace and feeling very much out of his depth, Queen Aura I of the Capua Kingdom was in another room of the royal residence. Her subordinates were investigating the

vast number of items that her soon-to-be husband had brought along from his own world.

“Open it all and look over everything carefully. If there are items you cannot open, do not force them. I shall question Sir Zenjirou myself later on. If you find anything dangerous or suspicious, bring it to me without delay,” she instructed.

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

“Understood.”

Soldiers wearing white leather armor and maids clad in white aprons over their exotic clothing moved to carry out her orders, cautiously going through the newcomer’s belongings. One of them started with the five-compartment fridge, sticking their head into each section in turn to check it out. Another was trying to make sense of the large air conditioner, staring at it curiously. A third opened up Zenjirou’s translucent suitcases, taking out each item of clothing, T-shirts and boxers alike, unfolding and refolding them as he went.

The task force spread out across the room, tackling the project as a team. The sheer number of things that had been brought so suddenly into the palace had to be thoroughly checked, even though they were owned by the future husband of the queen.

The work was undertaken exceedingly carefully to avoid damaging or besmirching those items. Because of that, the verification had progressed very little, despite more than ten people pooling their efforts.

When they found things that concerned them, they reported it straight to Aura.

“Your Majesty, these transparent containers seem to contain alcohol. They have a strange seal, so we are unsure of how to open them, but the ones that are broken smell of spirits.”

These were, of course, the drinks that Zenjirou had brought as a gift for Aura. The shock of the transfer had knocked some of them over. One bottle of sake and one wine bottle had broken, as they were made from relatively thin glass, and their contents had soaked into the rug.

Even before hearing the report, Aura had realized from the smell that he had

brought some spirits with him, so she gave a nod along with her next instructions.

“Gather the rest of the containers and store them in the wine cellar. Bring the broken ones to me. Oh, and take care transporting them; they seem far easier to shatter than wooden barrels.”

“At once, Your Majesty.”

“Yes, Madam. Here...”

Each of the soldiers took one bottle per hand and left the room. At the same time, a maid brought the broken containers to the queen. One was a frosted glass bottle of sake, and the other was a dark, transparent purplish-red bottle of red wine.

Aura lifted the fragments to the light coming in through the window and marveled at them. “Astonishing. It almost seems as if they are made of crystal. Are these common in my groom’s world?”

There was no glassworking in the Capua Kingdom. A common sake bottle looked more like a work of art than a container to the people of this world. This was particularly true of the ostentatious brandy and whiskey bottles.

“Your Majesty, these appear to be items of tableware. The cups and plates are both made of the same transparent material as the alcohol containers, or something like polished stone rather than wood or metal. Several of them were also broken during the transition.”

The tableware that Zenjirou had brought were all generic ceramics from Japan, including wine and whiskey glasses. He had brought the fragile goods after noticing that everything here was made of wood or metal instead. It hadn’t been enough for him to remark on during his last visit, but it had certainly seemed out of place to him, being so used to ceramic and glass tableware back home.

He may not even have been aware of it himself, but it was the drinks that had made him feel the most uncomfortable. Silver didn’t influence the taste quite as much as other metals, but it did have some effect. Forks and spoons were usually made of stainless steel in Japan, so the cutlery hadn’t drawn his

attention, but the cups were another matter. It was the same idea as tea tasting different when drunk from a plastic bottle, metal can, or glass, even if it was the exact same brand.

Aura picked up a transparent, colorless wineglass and flicked it with her finger, producing a soft chime. “This is magnificent as well. If I were to visit a noble with a taste for collecting art, it would make quite the gift.”

Of course, these were Zenjirou’s things, and she wouldn’t have the right to do as she pleased with them, even if she were his wife. He was an understanding, kindhearted person, though, so she might be able to ask him to accommodate her wishes.

Aura shook her head, drawing her mind away from the vision of enraptured nobles’ faces and back to the matter at hand. “Is there anything else?”

“Yes, Your Majesty, please take a look at this. Do these appear to be weapons to you?”

As he spoke, the soldier presented a blue, rectangular box with metal sticks, small spiraling nails, and strange bladed items with two blades opposing each other.

“Show me. Hmm... No, they are not weapons. I believe them to be tools of some sort. They seem too inefficient to be weapons,” Aura decided after looking over the driver set, screws, and pipe cutter.

She had no way of knowing they were all part of the tool set needed to put together the air conditioning system (assuming one had the relevant experience to use them). Zenjirou had also brought a hammer drill, vacuum pump, and accompanying gauge.

All of these were utterly alien to the people of this world.

Zenjirou had come to understand through his research that the probability of a layperson managing to build a functional air conditioning system was exceedingly low, but he had already bought the large unit at that point and had nothing to lose. He’d brought a printout of the entire page detailing how to install an AC unit. He wasn’t willing to give up on the idea of having that sort of convenience, but he’d also hurried to buy an electric fan and a metal container

that would fit into the freezer compartment just in case, so he wasn't blind to the possibility of failure.

Another soldier approached the queen with something that he could not determine the purpose of. "Your Majesty, do you think *this* may be a weapon? Please look, it appears to be an ordinary box, but there are several blades inside, and they spin quickly when you turn this horizontal pole."

"My, how intriguing. What an interesting mechanism. I do not believe it to be a weapon, either. How would you use it to attack?"

"You'd grab the enemy's hand, put it in the box and... turn... the handle?" the soldier suggested, realizing as he spoke just how unlikely it sounded and slowly trailing off.

"That would be an implement of torture, not a weapon," Aura chuckled. "Well, it may be dangerous depending on its use, but I do not believe it to have been made for an offensive attack, so put it back where you found it."

"At once!"

Zenjirou's ice crusher, given the ignominious label of a potential torture device, was placed safely back where it had come from.

As the process progressed, more and more things that the locals had absolutely no understanding of came to light. The huge number of soap bars that he'd stocked up on, his toothbrushes, his mosquito coils...

He'd brought several LED lights, which were at least similar in appearance to the large candlesticks that this world had, so the queen and her people had some general idea of their use. There was nothing in Zenjirou's possession in which to place a candle or oil lamp, though, so they, too, were ultimately mysteries.

As the items were inspected, a maid came over with the open rucksack that Zenjirou had been wearing. "Your Majesty, this mostly contains water, food, blankets, and clothing."

"Food and water?" Aura asked, thinking for several moments before nodding in understanding, "Ah, I see. The bag must have been prepared as a special measure for any unforeseen occurrences. I did not, in fact, explain to him what

would happen if the summoning failed.”

If the magic had failed, then it simply wouldn’t have activated. That meant Zenjirou’s emergency preparations had been in vain, but if one had to be judged at fault for that, it would be Aura.

“Curses, I caused him undue worry. I must apologize later... Hmm? What is it? Is there something else?” Aura realized that the woman holding the rucksack was behaving strangely, and her face was pale.

“Y-Yes,” the maid answered faintly, her face still pale, “L-Look at this.”

She removed two small pouches from the rucksack and presented them to Aura.

“Hmm, let’s see...” She casually opened the pouches and looked inside, only for her reddish-brown eyes to open wide as a gasp left her mouth.

The first pouch was stuffed with colorful, transparent jewels the size of a fingertip, and the second sparkled multi-chromatically with countless small objects with holes in the middle.

They were marbles and beads, another of Zenjirou’s precautions. He’d thought of something he could exchange for money in case he happened to end up adrift in some other part of the world. It couldn’t be something too bulky, so he had settled on beads and marbles, remembering that there wasn’t a single shard of glass to be seen within the palace.

It did make him feel a bit like he was treating the people of this world as uncultured savages, and he wasn’t fond of that feeling. However, needs must, and if he could trade a marble for a night of shelter, or some beads for a meal, he’d be happy to have them on hand.

At least, that had been his line of thought, but he had wildly mistaken the value of such items. While marbles were mere toys in Japan, they would be worth far more than a few coins here. Perfect spheres of glass almost without visible air bubbles, they could certainly be considered on par with jewels.

There were actually glass beads on Earth which had historical value, and were traded for over 1,000,000 yen apiece. Then again, the beads and marbles that Zenjirou had brought were nothing like that. They were the type of item you

could get a bag of for a few hundred yen a pop. But with glassmaking not being a known art in this world, their value was far greater than he had imagined.

“Put them back carefully,” she ordered.

“Y-Yes, ma’am!” The maid took the pouches back and returned them to the pocket of the rucksack as gently as if she were handling a bomb.

The long process of checking Zenjirou’s luggage was finally coming to an end. Once the number of soldiers and attendants lining the walls to stay out of the way became noticeable, Aura called out to the room at large.

“Is there nothing more to review?”

She’d already received reports on the majority of the items present, so she was fairly certain there would be nothing more of interest, but felt that it was best to get confirmation.

Her eyes found their way to a soldier standing over an open suitcase. He visibly stiffened at her gaze and quickly stuffed something into the case.

“Hold! What did you just conceal?! Don’t move; slowly remove your right hand from the case!” she ordered loudly in an accusatory tone. *What was that? Did he slip some sort of poison into my groom’s luggage?!*

The people in this room had been carefully selected, but was there a traitor among them? Aura’s severe gaze pierced the suspicious-looking soldier.

“Y-Your Majesty! I have done no—”

“Save your excuses! Be silent and remove your hand,” she interrupted sharply.

“Yes, Your Majesty.” He seemed to realize that going against her was meaningless and slowly removed his right hand from the case. There was a bright red cloth gripped in his fist, just as Aura had seen a moment before.

“What is that? Turn this way and unfold it.”

“Y-Your Majesty. This, is, um...”

“Unfold it,” she said forcefully, in a voice that brooked no further resistance.

The other soldiers, watching the situation play out from around the room, readied themselves, taking up short spears and swords from the wall and encircling the man who was currently under suspicion. The maids stopped their work and took refuge by the walls, behind the armed guards.

The air was thick with tension, and the room was painfully silent. They could hear the sound of someone gulping nervously.

The soldier at the center of it all heaved a sigh like he was giving up something precious as he unfurled the red cloth before his queen.

It was a thin gown—a woman's negligee.

Aura stared silently at the soldier through the cloth. And it really was *through* it... The soldier was holding it up in front of his face, but she could still see him through the fabric.



It was a type of fabric that in no way covered the body from sight. Aura stared speechlessly at the sheer article of clothing for a rather long period of time before calmly questioning the soldier. “Was that amongst my groom’s things?”

“Yes,” the man replied after a short pause, with the briefest possible wording. He had sworn his loyalty to the queen, and he would not lie.

The tension unraveled. The silence was pitiful. And now a gulp of arousal was heard from somewhere in the room.

In the middle of all that, Aura was standing with her head bowed, trying to suppress her feelings until she finally reached her limit, and her laughter suddenly filled the silent room.

“Ahahaha... I see, I see indeed. My apologies for the mistrust,” she said to the uncomfortable soldier.

“Not at all; my duties are to you,” was all he could offer in reply. Having considered the situation more calmly, he realized it was only natural that his attempt to hide something from her would have put him under suspicion. What a disaster, though. They had found lascivious clothing, clearly meant for a woman, within the queen’s husband’s possessions. The owner of those garments, and the woman that said owner was planning to give them to, was clear at a glance.

“I offer you my most sincere apologies for my suspicious actions and rash behavior,” he said, lowering his head meekly with the negligee still in his hand, spurring on Aura’s amusement even more.

“Do not let it concern you. As I said, it was I who was at fault. Forget it. Still, though, to think that such a thing was within his luggage... Ahaha,” her shoulders shook with laughter as she wiped the tears from her eyes before muttering, “Well, it would certainly appear he is indeed a *man*.”

She continued to laugh about it for some time, unconcerned with behaving so freely in front of her subordinates.

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Later that evening, Zenjirou was sitting on a doubtlessly expensive sofa that

was covered in black leather. His things were to be brought to this room and he was currently speaking with Aura.

“So, all my things are allowed within the inner palace?” he asked, having just been informed of the results of the security check. There was a clear expression of relief on his face as that fact was confirmed.

“Indeed. There are several items that I wish you to explain the functions of, but everything, including those, will be brought to the inner palace within the day... apart from the alcohol, which is already being stored in the wine cellar,” she explained with a placid nod from her place on the sofa facing him.

The scarlet light coming in through the open window from the setting sun shone crimson off her red hair. His breath was taken away by the sight of her before he suddenly remembered a question that had been on his mind.

“I don’t mind. The alcohol would have gone bad if it was just left where it was. But who moved it? I thought there were supposed to be no men besides me in the inner palace?”

The suitcases were one thing, but the two-meter-tall fridge and the generator were just too heavy. Maybe they had “power maids” who dealt with manual labor?

Aura waved her hand as those thoughts went through his head and answered easily. “Oh, we brought in trusted soldiers from the palace guard to do so. There are strict rules about men entering the inner palace, but there is a certain flexibility for temporary entry. Otherwise, we would have to find female masons and carpenters. You don’t think that the building itself or the fountains within the gardens require no maintenance, do you?” she asked teasingly.

Zenjirou accepted her explanation with an, “Ah, right.”

There were certainly problems that couldn’t be solved with women alone. Sticking strictly to a “no men allowed” policy in those cases would make the inner palace a much more difficult place to live.

That was good news to Zenjirou. If he could borrow some manpower, there were things he wanted to get done quickly.

“In that case, can I borrow some male workers? I brought something called a

hydroelectric generator and I'd like to set it up in the gardens somewhere, to make use of the water there," he requested, leaning forward on the sofa in the dimming light.

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The sole purpose of Yamai Zenjirou's presence in this world was for him to marry Queen Aura. Therefore, one could call it destiny that he was unable to escape the intensive preparations for that very ceremony after spending the night alone in a gargantuan bed within the unfamiliar surroundings of the inner palace.

Their wedding was to begin in fifteen days' time and would continue around the clock for five days after that. It was an awfully short period in which to both plan and hold the ceremony for a royal marriage.

The preparations had probably started a month before, once he had accepted her proposal, but a month and a half still only came to forty-four days, which was exceptionally short for a reigning monarch's wedding.

A kingdom the size of Capua would usually take at least a year to plan such a ceremony for a royal of direct lineage. That time frame would allow them to notify the nobility and royalty of domestic as well as foreign regions, permitting as many dignitaries as possible to attend, and allowing the event to be as extravagant as possible in order to show off their prestige.

A royal wedding was no mere celebration. It was an opportunity to gather influential people from across the lands, and an opportunity for hidden diplomacy.

With under two months to plan, however, they would at best be able to gather their own dignitaries, and those from abroad would likely not be able to make the necessary schedule adjustments in time to attend. Most would be able to send proxies, but that would be the extent of their participation. It was impossible to say that it would serve much use for hidden politicking. Frankly, it was a rather wasteful method.

The reason that Aura was pushing the wedding through, despite her awareness of these downsides, was that she didn't want to take long enough for anyone to interfere with it. This was, after all, the first time a reigning queen

would marry. An event without precedent, it would be simple for others to find faults with her plan.

There was no question that her marriage would complicate the power structure of the country. And to make matters worse, Zenjirou had such strong ties with the royal family that even if he had children with other women, the space-time magic would likely be passed down in any case.

If Aura's estimations were correct, even Zenjirou would be able to use space-time magic eventually if he were taught how, so as far as matters of lineage were concerned, he was very close to being directly descended from royalty himself. She could foresee at least one or two families suggesting that she remain single as a figurehead for a while, until a child between their own daughter and Zenjirou could take the throne.

Aura didn't consider her own political skills so lowly that she would be overcome by these kinds of heavy-handed methods, but it was better to avoid trouble wherever possible. So, with those thoughts in mind, she had decided to have an exceptionally short planning phase and to keep things small-scale as a result.

"Um... this is small-scale?" Zenjirou muttered as he sat in a room of the inner palace, having been told everything the night before.

"Did you say something, Master Zenjirou?"

There were several maids around where he was seated on a chair made from woven vines, all holding colorful fabric and dazzling jewels as they happily debated the merits of each.

As he could surmise from the evening dress that Aura wore, and the uniform-like clothes the maids had on, there was a spreading culture of western dress within the kingdom, but it seemed to be a fairly recent fad imported from another country. Marriages and other official duties called for more traditional attire.

They were currently deciding what kind of turban-type thing Zenjirou would wear for the ceremony, as well as the pin that would hold it in place.

The five-day wedding would include parading the two of them about the capital within a carriage, and it was the norm for nobles to wear a turban-like garment when they were outside in Capua.

He thought back to Amanda asking him what kind of turban he preferred and, utterly lacking any knowledge of the fashions of this world, he had left it entirely up to the maids.

Said maids had gotten quite fired up over that opportunity and had been with him ever since.

“No, nothing at all; carry on.”

“At once, sir.”

He’d been sitting there for over an hour now, and there was no sign of a resolution to the turban matter in sight. In addition, the maids in charge of choosing the ceremonial sword and belt he would wear on the day-of were lurking in the background, awaiting their turn. The whole day would probably be spent in this fashion.

I got permission to borrow some soldiers, and I’d like to get the generator set up as quickly as possible...

He remained utterly motionless to make the maids’ jobs easier as he sighed internally. He had only been in the inner palace for a day, but already felt a keen sense of longing at being cut off from modern conveniences.

The maids, however, knew nothing of their master’s thoughts and were devoting themselves to choosing items that would live up to his expectations. Their demeanors told him that they thought of his shame as their own, so he couldn’t explain that he had other things he wanted to do and to hurry it up.

He still felt uncomfortable, but it was easier without feeling pressured to put on as many airs as yesterday. He’d talked with Aura about it the previous night and she had told him, “Regardless of what anyone else thinks, I do not mind if you speak in the way that is most comfortable to you while in the inner palace. But the attendants may be uneasy if you’re *too* polite.”

She had told him that the inner palace was a personal space for the royal family, and that the attendants there would take his own preferences into

consideration, since mentally tiring out their liege with formalities was contrary to their goal of maximizing his comfort.

Such an opportunity was most welcome to him, and he had immediately switched back to speaking as he normally would. The maids were thrown a bit at first, but soon got used to how he spoke and conversed with him in a more relaxed fashion in turn.

“The flying dragon pin with ruby eyes would seem to be the best choice. To match well with what you wear on the day of the wedding, I would recommend a white turban.”

They seemed to have finally come to a decision.

“Right, let’s try that, then,” he said, suppressing a sigh of relief.

“At once, sir, excuse me,” she said, her joy at having her suggestions accepted quite evident as she wrapped the turban around his head with practiced movements.

Whoa, it’s like magic, Zenjirou thought as he looked at the garment now covering his head. It had been nothing more than a wide strip of fabric until mere moments before.

The maid who had wrapped it around him finally finished weaving the pin directly above the center of his forehead through the layers of cloth. “How do you like it, Master Zenjirou?” she asked him proudly.

Zenjirou turned his head to and fro, looking at it from different angles in front of the mirror. He saw the younger maids try to get a peek but they were rebuffed by their seniors.

“Yeah, that works,” he answered calmly, suppressing his laughter at the scene before him.

On the subject of the mirror, this world only knew of looking glasses that were made by polishing silver or bronze, or filling a metal bowl with water to create a reflective surface, so the glass mirror that he had brought with him had made quite an impact.

He’d primarily bought it for shaving and brushing his teeth, so it was big

enough that it easily reflected his whole face. He couldn't imagine how much it would cost to make a mirror of this size from bronze, let alone silver. The metal had to have no defects or imperfections, so increasing the size even slightly would increase the cost exponentially.

Of course, more than anything else, there was a large difference in the reflectivity of metal versus glass mirrors. For someone used to the vague images from a metal mirror, the glass must have looked like a window to another world.

"I'm glad. I would like to propose this turban and pin for the day, then," the maid said after recovering from an elbow to the ribs from one of her coworkers, and the other maids smiled widely in agreement. A collection of beauties like that smiling all around him really did make things feel much lighter.

"Next, then, I thought we could move on to choosing the ceremonial blade and belt. Is that to your liking?"

"Sure... I'll leave it to you," he nodded, forcing a smile onto his face as he accepted his fate of being used as a dress-up doll for another hour or so.

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As with the days leading up to his move, time spent busily in this new world went by in a flash. Just over two weeks had passed since he had made the transition, and his wedding had arrived in the midst of the chaos.

There was a large hall in the palace of the Capua Kingdom that was only used for marriages between royals, or nobles of similar status. It was called the Hall of the Dragon King.

The floor of the room was covered with a carpet depicting an ancient dragon in a rich red color. The material was so thick that if you stood barefoot on it, you would sink up to your ankles. It was a remnant of a time when the norm was to sit directly on the floor.

Nowadays, the cultural norms of the Northern Continent had made their way as far as Capua, so the palace had chairs and tables, and people would rarely sit upon the floor itself anymore, but carpets that offered the option of such

comfort were a simple way of demonstrating one's wealth and influence. With that in mind, you could say that having an absurdly large and thick carpet made the Hall of the Dragon King quite well suited to a royal wedding.

Of course, only families who enjoyed a certain degree of status were even allowed to set foot in the magnificent space. The enormous room had several round tables where nobles would gather in their separate factions and sit together.

However, it seemed like this particular wedding was not meant to be a terribly strict ceremony. While there was no food at the tables yet, drinks and the like were being provided, and the aristocracy quenched their thirst and chattered away.

The topics of conversation naturally centered on the marriage that was to take place that day between their queen, Aura, and the mysterious Zenjirou.

"How daring of Our Majesty to marry a man from another world!"

"Truly. What kind of person might he be?"

"There may be no secondary royals within the kingdom to object to her husband, but..."

"The real question is, how much mana does he possess?"

"The rumors at least suggest that he would not shame the royal family."

"Oh?! That would be most fortuitous were it truly the case."

"Indeed. It may even be possible for women other than Her Majesty to be invited into the inner palace, to increase the number of those who carry royal blood."

While the nobles indulged in their gossip, a young man in a civil official's uniform appeared from the antechamber. He strode over to a large gong that was set up in the corner, picked up a wooden mallet and slammed it against the metal.

The reverberating echo quieted the crowd and drew their attention. With all eyes on him, the young official proclaimed loudly, "We shall now proceed with the marriage between Their Majesties: the one true ruler of our great nation,

born from time and space, our magnanimous, sagacious Queen Aura I, and His Royal Highness Zenjirou Yamai.

“Their Majesties will now enter!”

The surrounding nobles fell utterly silent at those words, their expectant faces turning to look at the entrance to the great hall. Just what would the queen’s rumored groom be like? The high-ranking nobles looked on with calculating gazes, and those of lower ranks seemed more curious than anything else, eagerly awaiting the entrance of their new king.

Before long, the couple appeared at the door. The path from the entrance to the dais was lit by shafts of sunlight shining into the room, and that was no coincidence. The Hall of the Dragon King had been specially optimized for such impressive marriages. The schedule, too, had been adjusted so that the couple would make their entrance at just the right moment and have their path lit up by the sun.

Zenjirou fought the urge to shut his eyes as he stepped into the bright light, walking slowly into the room. *Ugh, it’s no good. If I look around, I’m going to go crazy!* he thought to himself as he felt many gazes converge on him at once.

The hall was filled to the brim with finely-dressed nobles, all of them looking straight at him, so he forced himself to focus on putting one foot in front of the other. He was actually rather grateful for the sunlight streaming in, as it made it harder to see all the eyes that were set on him.

Aura linked arms with him as they walked through the hall, step by step. She was resplendent in her wedding gown, and Zenjirou wore a belt and an ornamental sword over a black suit.

Astute observers would have noticed the effort the pair were putting into their movements, both making sure that neither of them stepped forward before the other, walking perfectly in sync.

If Aura walked ahead, she would receive a bad reputation as a woman who stood before her man. If Zenjirou were to do the same, he’d give the image of an outsider guiding the queen. The precise way in which they walked was just one of many things that royalty needed to pay careful attention to.

Without scrutinizing things so closely, though, Aura looked like a woman full of happiness, dressed to the nines in her wedding gown.

She was wearing a sleeveless white dress. The skirt wasn't long enough for a train, even if it did flare out, and it was woven with freshly picked flowers rather than decorated with lace. While there were slight differences, the beautiful outfit could pass for a wedding dress even on Earth.

Come to think of it, a wedding kimono and a Western dress are both white, Zenjirou thought to himself.

Wondering if white being the color for newlyweds was a practice that spanned worlds in addition to Earthly borders, he managed to take his mind off the probing gazes coming from either side as Aura placed her right hand on his left arm.

Zenjirou was wearing a black suit that he had brought with him just in case, which was usually used for family events. Standing next to Aura's magnificent ensemble, her head topped with a crown, it might have looked a little shabby, but there was no way around it.

The country was built around the concept of the man being the head of the family, and there was no precedent for someone marrying a reigning queen. Zenjirou's clothing and behavior on the dais were a matter of hot debate. Or rather, there was no consensus at all on what the appropriate etiquette for such an event should be.

Capuan custom dictated that he, as the husband, should be even more splendidly dressed than Aura. But as she was currently the reigning monarch, she was expected to carry out the ceremony in her crown jewels. Despite being the man, if he dressed more majestically than her, it would call the absoluteness of her rule into question. On the other hand, if he wore less ostentatious clothing, people would accuse them of making light of the country's traditions.

In the end, Aura had used the fact that Zenjirou was from another world to obfuscate matters. Allowing him to wear clothing from his homeworld would be seen as an expression of the respect he was due as her husband.

Technically, the black suit he had brought along was sufficient for attending

such a ceremony as a guest back on Earth, but it was not something that a *groom* would normally wear. However, Zenjirou was the only one who knew that, so he merely needed to keep quiet about it and they had found a solution to the Capuan cultural concerns.

At present, he was more concerned about the aromatic oil that had been used to slick his short hair into a side-part. The whole ceremony would take place indoors, so he was glad not to need the turban but was less enthusiastic about having his hair styled with the strange-smelling oil to make up for it.

Argh, so itchy, and it reeks. I just wanna wash it all off...

As his nerves faded, those discomforts started taking up more of his thoughts. He continued to focus on walking slowly, resisting the growing urge to scratch his head and shield his eyes.

The vast majority of the local nobles had their gazes directed not on the familiar sight of Queen Aura, but on the man who would become her husband.

“Oh, so that’s him.”

“He does indeed have a fair abundance of mana.”

“It seems rather likely that the inherent magic will indeed be passed on.”

“Not only that, it seems possible we should expect a child with another woman to also inherit that magic.”

“Which would mean the inner palace will—”

“No, no, it is far too soon for such speculation. His character is the question.”

“I understand that he shut himself up within the inner palace for the half-month he has been here and has barely been seen.”

“So, he’s to be a spouse of convenience for her?”

“We shall see about that.”

“If we at least had some inkling of his tastes, it could be an opportunity to get close to him.”

“This is merely a rumor, but he supposedly has a liking for sheer red...”

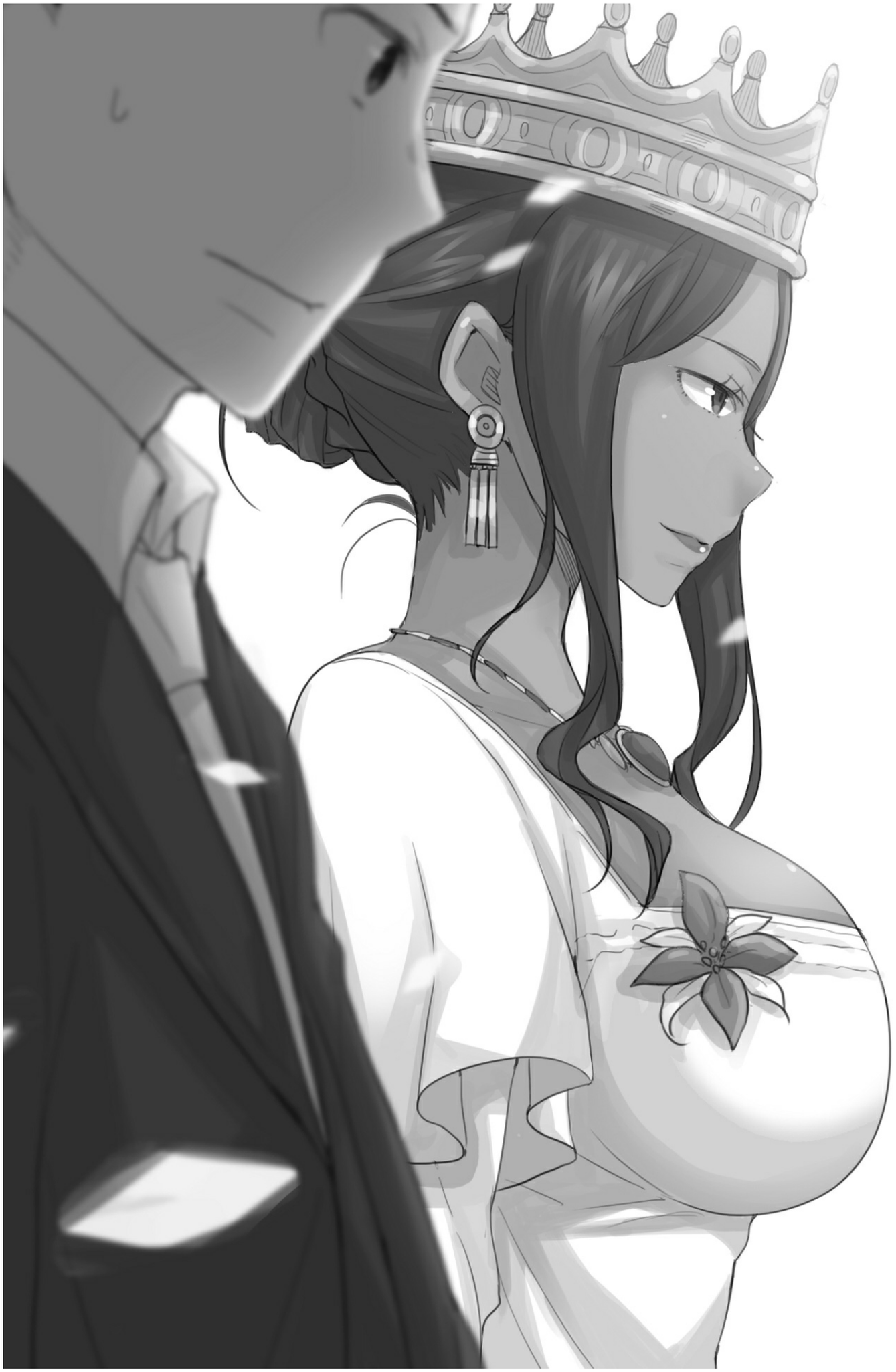
Zenjirou focused solely on the warmth from Aura's hand on his arm so that he could ignore the stabbing looks that surrounded him as he proceeded through the great hall on stiff legs. As he walked on, the distance between the nobles and himself decreased. Their point-blank inquisitiveness made his nerves skyrocket.

Crap, I can't feel my legs!

He couldn't even tell if he was on the thick carpet or hard stones at this point. He had never thought that walking in a straight line could be so difficult.

Shit, I'm gonna fall. I'm totally gonna fall!

His face drew tight as he felt a cold sweat run down his neck, but his bride avoided the danger for him. Noticing that he was about to lose his balance, she supported him under the pretense of holding onto his arm, keeping him firmly upright.



Ah?! Phew...

As a member of the royal family, Aura had spent her life in the public eye and was now a queen. Zenjirou, on the other hand, had been a run-of-the-mill office drone until now. It was only to be expected that she was far more used to this type of environment, but he still felt pathetic needing his bride's help to walk across a room.

This new train of thought had an upside, at least. While obsessing over his actions, Zenjirou had forgotten about all the eyes on him and regained the ability to keep his balance as he walked. At last, they reached the aging priest awaiting them on the dais and came to a stop before him.

The countries of the Southern Continent practiced animism almost without exception. There were genuine spirits that existed and blessed the people with magic, so there wasn't much opportunity for other religions to develop. There were some who believed in the ancient dragons that were said to once exist, but here in the Kingdom of Capua, they were in the minority.

That said, even with the more common animistic religions, there was no central organization whose influence transcended borders. The main duty of the priests in this world was to perform marriages just like this.

"May the blessings of the countless spirits be ever upon this pair. May you listen to the voices of your ancestors should you encounter hardships within your lives. May the husband protect the wife, and the wife support the husband..."

The priest's benedictions continued in a drone from the dais. It seemed the generic wedding blessings weren't all that different between the two worlds. But this world had magic, so Zenjirou thought it possible that the blessings here had actual power behind them, although he'd been told otherwise when he'd asked.

The ceremony soon left Zenjirou behind, his nerves overtaking him once more and barely allowing him to absorb the priest's words.

◇◆◇◆◇◆◇◆

Later that night, the newlyweds were seated upon sofas on either side of a

table in the inner palace, each appreciating the other's exhaustion.

"Whew, we got through it," Zenjirou sighed.

Aura chuckled. "You must be tired, my husband. Well, it is much the same for me."

After the three-hour ceremony, they'd had to participate in a two-hour event called a "debut." If the official marriage ceremony was meant to present them as a couple to the high-class nobles, the debut served to do the same for the mid-and lower-class nobles who were not permitted to attend the first celebration.

It was a simple affair, consisting only of waving from a balcony to those enjoying a buffet being held in the garden below, but two hours of that was tiring in and of itself. Zenjirou, not used to such show and pomp, was quite drained by it all, but the same was true for Aura, having supported him throughout the day.

Zenjirou didn't even have the wherewithal to decline the servants' aid in bathing as he usually did. Or, more accurately, the maid in charge of the baths had refused to allow him to bathe alone once she saw his weary expression.

Indeed, despite the baths in the inner palace being large and luxurious, they were not as refined as those of modern Japan. There were no showers or mirrors. The floor, paved with huge stones, was certainly beautiful but horrendously slippery when you were wet with soap and water. As a result, bathing alone when one was tired could be dangerous.

After getting through their baths, Zenjirou and Aura had collapsed onto the sofas in comfortable, casual clothing, finally released from the formalities of the day.

Aura was wearing a nightgown with a deep slit that ran up to her hips, and Zenjirou was wearing striped blue pajamas that he'd brought from his own world. They were awfully informal garments, but the two were now officially married, after all. There was no problem with a man and woman about to consummate their marriage wearing such laid-back attire in front of each other.

That said, every time he caught a glimpse of her legs through the slit in the

nightgown, Zenjirou couldn't help but be all too aware of it. He would finally be taking the beguiling woman before him into his arms that very night.

Crap, I can't even tell if I'm horny or nervous.

"It's... hot. Would you like something to drink as well, ma'am?" he asked in an effort to hide his nerves, rising from the sofa.

"Yes, I believe I would."

"Right, I'll open a bottle of wine, then. The bottle of red broke during the trip, unfortunately, but the white and rosé are fine."

Zenjirou headed across the room to where the fridge was humming quietly. He had eventually managed to get the micro-hydroelectric generator successfully set up in the inner palace gardens.

As expected, there was a bit of a drop in output from when the professionals had first installed it back in Japan, but it was enough to run all the main appliances he had brought.

The fridge was set up in one corner, and there was a TV farther along the wall. The room was lit by six floor lamps, all of which were currently running smoothly.

He took a bottle of white wine from the fridge along with two glasses from the cupboard next to it, then returned to the sofa where his new wife was waiting.

I'm screwed. I'm not proud of it, but I haven't had a girlfriend since second year at uni. I've got no idea how to set the mood.

His dating history consisted solely of a single girlfriend during his second year at university, which had lasted only a year. So, while he was no virgin and had not spent his *entire* life single, he couldn't deny that he wasn't used to being with women.

"Here you are," he said, placing a glass in front of Aura before heading back to the other sofa with the second glass still in his hand.

It was then that Aura spoke up. "Sir Zenjirou, would it not please you to perhaps sit here rather than over there?" She patted the seat next to her.

He stuttered in shock, the wineglass still in his hand. “Oh? But, that’s, umm...”

“It is fine, is it not? We are now a married couple. No one would object to our sitting together.”

Continued hesitation felt wrong after that. “Right, excuse me, then,” he replied with a nod, sitting down next to her. Their thighs locked comfortably together and silence fell.

Aah, this is way too close.

Sitting leg-to-leg on a sofa that would easily seat five large adults felt awkward. Then again, purposefully sitting farther away would have been equally uncomfortable. As Aura had said, they were husband and wife now. There was no reason to avoid contact while they were alone.

Zenjirou started to panic. *I’ve gotta say something!*

But it was Aura who spoke in her usual calm voice, sipping her wine as her husband frantically searched for a topic of conversation.

“These ‘electrical appliances’ you brought are truly magnificent. Such illumination and cooling! It almost feels as if we are in the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gillbelle.”

She looked at the lights around the room as she spoke. The lamps were large, each about the size of a person, and used LED lights. He had brought eight of them to this world, each requiring three bulbs. There were currently six set up in the living room, with two more in the bedroom.

The six sets of bulbs at full brightness lit the room as well as anything in modern Japan, though with the lighting coming from floor lamps rather than from above, the illumination was somewhat uneven.

Since lighting was a big part of the mood, there were two lamps specially placed near the sofa.

Zenjirou gave a pained smile at her obvious effort to help him out. “They are. When we weren’t preparing for the wedding, I spent most of my time getting the generator set up,” he said somewhat proudly.

His only form of “work” since arriving had been to install the generator in the

gardens and run the cord connecting it up to his room. The actual lifting and carrying, along with the task of physically connecting the generator's tank to the fountain and moving the stones of the wall to pass the cord through it had all been down to the soldiers that Aura had arranged for him.

The temperatures that month had soared above 35°C (and it didn't just feel that way, it was what the thermometer he'd brought actually said)—hot enough to be midsummer in Japan. Zenjirou had drawn up the plans to safely move the generator and install it, explained the process to the workers, and given directions throughout... all in that blistering heat.

Considering the reason Aura had chosen him to be her husband, he knew that being in contact with so many people and demonstrating leadership was something he should refrain from, but he'd had no choice on that occasion. It wasn't a job that could have been done if merely left to the people of this world.

The generator transformed the kinetic energy of the falling water into electricity, so the tank had to be higher than the turbine. To accomplish that, they'd packed dirt beneath the tank to raise it up. But then the intake mechanism couldn't actually pick up any water. If it wasn't one thing, it was another.

Once they'd finally gotten it to a point—with much trial and error—where there was a sufficient flow of water to produce a constant supply of electricity, he'd fist-pumped and yelled in triumph in spite of what the people around him thought. His hard work had paid off. The fridge, lights, and even computer were all working well.

"Your efforts have indeed shown their value. Chilled alcohol is surprisingly pleasant," Aura noted, draining her glass in a single draft and placing it silently on the table. She chuckled softly, then used both of her hands to pull his right arm into the valley between her breasts, coquettishly resting her head on her new husband's shoulder.

His right arm was enveloped by a soft feeling. He felt her hot, moist breath pass along the nape of his neck as the scent of the citrus shampoo he had brought over wafted from her red hair. The sensations sent his head spinning.

“Guh. A-Ah, r-right, you said something about Twin Kingdoms earlier? They have appliances like these?”

A chuckle rumbled up from the back of Aura’s throat at his nervous babbling, even as she answered his question.

“Indeed, the Twin Kingdoms of Sharou-Gillbelle. It is a large territory that is ruled somewhat unusually by two royal families, the Sharou family, in possession of conferral magic, and the Gillbelle family, with healing magic. The territories stand astride the center of the Southern Continent. It is the only country where it is possible to create magic items, and they use light orbs to illuminate the palace, wind orbs to cool the area when it is too hot, and fire orbs to stay warm when it is cooler.

“Of course, you may learn this sort of information at any point you wish. But, Sir Zenjirou, there is one thing that has me feeling most unsatisfied.”

Aura suddenly took his face with both hands and pulled him around to look at her.

“W-W-W-What would that be, ma’am?” he stammered, looking at her face from so close that it wasn’t even in focus.

“Exactly that. You speak so formally with me and call me ‘ma’am.’ Can you not stop that now? It is not your usual way of speaking, is it? We are now husband and wife. It may be too much for me to expect you to change immediately, but these things only become natural by doing. What do you say? Will you speak with me as you normally would?”

She was right, of course; Zenjirou still spoke to her quite formally. Once he regained his wits somewhat, he managed an answer.

“That’s true, actually... but, you’re the same, Aura, ma’am.”

“I always speak in this way. I am hardly humbling myself. But, yes, I suppose calling my husband ‘Sir’ in private is rather standoffish. In that case, may I simply call you Zenjirou?” She smiled gently and waited as her husband’s gaze remained fixed on her soft lips and earnest expression.

“Oh, yes. I mean... yeah, sure.”

“Thank you, Zenjirou,” she said, her smile widening at his answer. “And would you call me by my name as well?”

Her insistence made it seem like that had been part of their agreement all along, even though no such prior understanding had been reached. Perhaps it was to be expected from a queen who was raised around the art of negotiation.

Zenjirou was overwhelmed by her. “A-Aura...” he said.

“Zenjirou.”

“Aura.”

The couple was face to face as they murmured each other’s names, their breath tickling each other’s cheeks. They were a man and woman who had agreed to become one that night. Who was the first to bring their lips to the other’s?

“Ngh...”

“M-mngh...”

Whatever the case, their mouths met almost as if they had planned it from the start. At the same time, Zenjirou’s arms encircled the queen, and hers smoothly twined around the back of his neck.

“Ngh, nngh, nnnnngh...”

“Ah... mng... ngh.”

Their lips met frenziedly in their affectionate embrace.

“Phwah!”

“Aahh...”

Eventually, their passionate kissing came to a close, both of them separating almost simultaneously. However, their embrace would not end so quickly.

Her lips now away from his, Aura rested her chin on his shoulder and tightened her grip, whispering maddeningly into his ear, “I shall retire to the bedroom. There are things a woman must get in order first, so follow once you have counted slowly to one hundred.”

With that, she slipped from his arms and stood up.

“What? A... Aura?”

The queen turned her head to look at him as he reflexively reached out for her, and gave him a sultry smile.

“Fear not, I shall not take flight. Count to one hundred, and I shall be waiting for you inside.”

She left those words hanging in the air as she slipped through the door into the bedchamber.

The first thing that Aura did after disappearing into the bedroom was close the door behind her with a deep breath. She then headed straight to the side of the bed and flicked the switch on one of the lamps. Zenjirou had shown her how to use them, but turning it on herself made the sense of wonder well up once more.

The bulbs in the room weren’t white, but a warm orange like an incandescent light. Zenjirou had said that it suited the bedroom mood better, but Aura didn’t see the difference.

Despite everything, she thought back on her earlier actions in the orange-lit room and her cheeks reddened as her voluptuous body writhed.

“That was rather exciting... Is it the norm for couples to perform such happy and embarrassing acts each night?”

She wrapped her arms around herself, still clad in the sensual nightgown. Her heart was pounding and she felt hot all over, from her head to her toes, as if she had some sort of fever.

“Surely Sir Zenjirou did not notice? No, we were so close, he could hardly not... What should I do?!”

Her heart was racing and her skin was burning in anticipation of their first night together. Would he think her shameless? She was in such a state of disarray that she didn’t even notice she was referring to Zenjirou formally again.

It wasn’t surprising. Aura may have lived longer and risked her life on more occasions than Zenjirou, but in terms of experience with the opposite sex, she

had even less than his one girlfriend. She was a true maiden.

Unlike the men of the royal family, who were often encouraged to spread their seed widely, the women were expected to accept the seed of a better bloodline and remain otherwise chaste as a rule. Therefore, an unmarried queen was inevitably thought of as being inexperienced in such matters.

Capuan culture placed the man at the helm of the relationship, so there would be no problem with admitting to that lack of experience and entrusting herself to Zenjirou. But even now her queenly dignity, or perhaps her conceit as his senior, kept her determined to feign composure.

She shed her red nightgown and went to climb atop the king-size bed, half-naked in nothing more than a small pair of shorts, when she suddenly realized, “It is... too bright.”

Even a single one of the LED lamps illuminated the bed rather clearly. Aura was used to her light coming from candles and oil lamps, so she couldn’t help but hesitate in embarrassment at having her first time be in such a brightly lit room.

“Hmm, perhaps this will moderate it,” she murmured, hanging the red fabric she had just slipped off over the lamp.

As she had hoped, the brightness was sufficiently diminished, but the light passing through the red cloth gave the room a somewhat obscene atmosphere.

“Well, I suppose I cannot concern myself too much with it.”

Her husband was liable to enter the room at any moment, so she couldn’t dither for too long. Resolved, she climbed onto the bed and arranged herself in the center. Then she started taking deep breaths to make herself at least appear calm and slow her racing heart, maintaining that effort for some time.

The silence was eventually broken by a knock at the door, and she flinched nervously.

“Hi, can I come in now?”

Aura took one more deep breath when she heard her husband’s voice through the door, and used her usual, cool voice to answer.

“You may indeed, enter and be welcome, Zenjirou.”

“E-Excuse m—” Zenjirou hesitantly pushed the door open and stepped inside, his words catching as he caught sight of Aura illuminated by the reddish-orange lights.

Her upper half was resting on the pillows as she lay upon the large bed. She had slipped her lower half under a thin, towel-like cloth, although the lines of her naked body were clearly visible. Her upper body was covered only by her hair, which was splayed across her breasts, barely hiding anything beneath.

“My, are you going to stand there all night, Zenjirou? You need not be shy. Come to me, and let us spend our night in passion.”

Not an ounce of her previous agitation could be seen as she offered her salacious invitation.

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“Phew...”

Their consummation safely completed, Zenjirou threw his sweaty body back onto the bed. The rush of activity between them in the sweltering night had significantly drained his energy, but his mind was racing.

The intimacy with his new wife had been such a charming experience that he would have immediately agreed to a second round if their bodies were ready for it.

“Hah, hah, hah, hahh...” The queen, on the other hand, was breathing roughly at his side, unable to even look in his direction.

Sex would ordinarily exhaust a man more than a woman, with the exception of certain positions. But it appeared the tension that Aura had felt over it being her first time had really taken it out of her. She should have had significantly more stamina than Zenjirou, yet was clearly quite drained.

Zenjirou still hadn’t fully softened, but his mind had cleared significantly after ejaculating. His eyes were drawn to his wife’s breasts as they heaved up and down with every breath, but he didn’t move to initiate a second round right away.

Still prone, he stretched his hand across the bed and picked up the gauze handkerchief and orange towel he had placed there beforehand. After wiping his crotch with the handkerchief, he used the towel to wipe off Aura as she breathed heavily.

“Oh? Ahh... My thanks,” she said, finally opening her eyes a bit at the soft sensation of the modern towel he’d brought as she thanked Zenjirou for his devotion.

“It’s fine. Are you okay? I wasn’t too rough?” he asked, wiping the pearls of sweat from her body.

Passing the towel over her soft breasts and the tempting lines of her abdomen, he felt his blood surging lustfully southward again, but kept himself in check. Going for it again with a woman still recovering from her first-ever sexual encounter was presumptuous, even if they were husband and wife.

Aura’s body seemed to remain quite sensitive after finishing, and she let out seductive cries each time the towel rubbed over her nipples or between her legs. But once he was done cleaning the sweat from her, she managed to muster the energy to look at him and speak.

“So, I suppose that is the end of it, no?” she asked, resting her head on the pillow and turning to gaze at him.

“Yeah, we’re more or less done. How was it, umm... for you?” he responded timidly, lying sideways on one hand. He realized a bit late that he had perhaps been a little aggressive earlier.

Aura smiled in the orange light with a grin that was somewhere between soft and reluctant. “Well, how to put it? It certainly was an unfamiliar sensation. It was my first such experience despite my years on the battlefields of both war and politics. The first experience that made me consider ‘surrender,’ that is,” she replied somewhat reproachfully.

“Ugh, umm... sorry.”

“It is nothing to apologize for. I am merely unused to these sensations, despite my appearance. I would appreciate it if you could make some allowances.”

“Yeah, of course... I will,” he said, feeling guilty at his wife’s words, although he had no confidence that he’d be able to keep that promise. He hadn’t meant to get so excited this time around, either, so there was honestly a chance of him unintentionally being just as aggressive the next time.

Perhaps sensing his thoughts, her reluctant smile deepened and she shrugged her naked shoulders with a sigh. “Well, it is inevitable. I suppose this is part of a wife’s duties. Besides, I have been with no other man but you, so this is no comparison to anyone, merely my own impression.”

“Hm? W-What?” he asked, filled with trepidation at the thought of what she would say.

“You are surprisingly pushy,” she told him bluntly, although not unkindly.

“Agh...”

Thinking back on his actions that night, he couldn’t contradict her. Unable to come up with a response, he buried his face in the sheets, sulking like a child.

“Have you calmed down now?” Aura asked a bit later, once Zenjirou had somewhat recovered from being branded a pushy pervert.

“Yeah, I guess,” he answered, lifting his face up from the sheets to look at her.

It seemed that Aura’s fatigue had abated while he had hidden in shame, and she was now lying next to him, holding her head up with her right arm as she watched him in amusement.

The sweat that had covered her body seemed to have evaporated as well. The temperature was in the high twenties tonight, so having wiped off the sweat, there would be no problem with sleeping naked.

“Then shall we turn in for the night? We have an early morning ahead of us,” she remarked, offering the suggestion now that her husband had finally met her gaze.

Their consummation had come and gone without drama. The marriage itself had been completed, but they were to be paraded about the city in the carriage the next day, and were expected to attend various other functions related to

the wedding after that. It was important for them to be well rested.

“Yeah, let’s...” he nodded, with a regretful look at his wife’s voluminous breasts before suddenly remembering an important detail. “Oh, right! I forgot!”

“Zenjirou?” she asked, surprised to see him leaping from the bed.

“Wait right there, I’ll be back in a minute!” he told her, rushing out of the room.

“What is it?” Aura half-rose before he came back from the living room, still in the nude. The only difference was the blue velvet box in his hand.

Aura suddenly remembered him asking for a ring that fit her left ring finger before he’d briefly returned to his own world. “Ah, so that was why... I see.”

It was easy to imagine what was in the box. Zenjirou took her clothing off the lamp, bathing the room in its original brightness.

“Aura, would you please get up from the bed and stand in front of me? It won’t take long.”

“Very well,” she agreed, following his instructions, her heart racing even though she knew what he was planning to give her.

It was a different kind of excitement than the earlier feeling of joining with a man, and Aura stood before him brimming with that feeling. Naked, the pair faced each other in the glow of the lamp.

Zenjirou produced a ring with three diamonds embedded in its golden band. The Ring Exchange. Ordinarily, it would take place in front of a priest, while they were wearing a wedding dress and tuxedo, but their ceremony had followed Capuan traditions, so he hadn’t been able to bring it up before.

That said, waiting until the five days of ceremonies were over would kill the mood, so this felt like the right time to do it, now that they had consummated their union.

As he thought over the details, Zenjirou placed the ring he would give her in his hand and took a step towards her.

“This is a custom from my world. The bride and groom place a ring on each other’s left ring finger and vow to love each other forever. Aura, please hold out

your left hand.”

“I understand. Does this work?”

Zenjirou took her left hand, which she held just in front of her chest, in his own. “I take thee to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, and with this ring, I do wed thee.”

As he vowed his eternal love, he slid the ring on. The gold band may have been colder than expected, as Aura flinched when it touched her skin, but she didn’t react otherwise, and the ring made its way smoothly to the base of her finger.

“Can you do the same?” he asked. “Here.”

“Yes... very well.”

He passed her a second ring with the same design as the one now upon her hand, but slightly larger. She held the ring silently for a moment, lost in thought, but eventually placed it onto his finger in the same way.

“Is this right?”

“Yeah. Thanks. We’re done now,” he said, smiling happily as he looked at the ring now adorning his hand in the lamp light. As someone from Earth, it really did make him feel like he was married now, far more than this world’s wedding ceremony. At any rate, he’d done what he had intended to do.

“Oaths upon ‘wedding rings’? An interesting custom. If we spread it properly, it may become the fashion here as well.”

He laughed. “I’d like that. We’d be the first couple to exchange them.”

“That would be amusing indeed.”

The two of them returned to the bed.

“Good night, Aura.”

“Yes, good night. I apologize, but we really are going to sleep now. If we were to do any more, it would get in the way of our duties tomorrow.”

“W-We won’t. It’s fine, I’m sleeping too.”

She considered teasing him further at his disappointed expression, but that would cut into their rest as well, so she decided against it.

“I’m turning the light off, then,” Zenjirou said, reaching out, and a moment later plunging the room into darkness.

“Aura...” he murmured.

“Zenjirou.”

The newlyweds’ hands naturally reached for each other at the center of the bed. The room was warm enough to be slightly uncomfortable even without clothing, but strangely, they considered the warmth of each other’s bodies pleasant.

Before long, they found themselves huddled together as deep, quiet breaths became the only noise in the room.

Chapter 4 — The Mysteries of the Soul of Language

The electronic tones playing from the side of Zenjirou's pillow woke him from his slumber.

"N...ngh?"

Still half-dreaming, he reached out and groped around for his phone, shutting off the alarm before bringing it to his face and checking the time.

5:30 AM.

It was rather early for an office worker in modern Japan but relatively late for a person of this world. In a civilization with only natural flames for illumination for the most part, daylight hours were precious. It was the norm for locals to rise with the sun at just past four in the morning, and sleeping in until this hour was certainly a sign of luxury.

For Zenjirou, though, there was no need to set his alarm for such an early hour. He had lamps to light up the night with and no pressing work to do during the day. There was only one reason he used his alarm to wake up even earlier than when he had been an office worker. It was so that he didn't miss his wife, Aura, in the mornings. After all, going to bed together but waking up after she had already left for work would have been a little lonely.

He put his phone back and slid over to the left of the bed where Aura's defenseless form lay, sleeping peacefully. It was the tenth day since they had consummated their marriage.

Their habit was to go to sleep just as they were once they'd finished devoting themselves to their marital duties and wiping themselves off with a damp towel, so the two of them were currently without a stitch of clothing. Technically, they had a thin blanket covering them, but even the insubstantial cloth felt heavy given how hot the Capuan nights were.

He curled his arm around the queen half-unconsciously, lightly brushing his hand against her back. The sensation of her breath on his chest and the warmth

from her body on his hand brought their actions from each night to mind.

“Aura...”

He had slept with this woman. That reality had quickly formed a sense of affection for her. He held her to him, her naked breasts pressing against his own chest as he lovingly ran a hand through his beloved wife’s long red hair.

Of course, that inevitably led to her waking up.

“Ng... ah...? Zenjirou?”

Having awoken, she let herself relax into his arms, closing in on his body and rubbing her head against his neck, purring like a cat being stroked.

Actually, it’s more like I managed to win over a lioness or tigress rather than a cat.

Zenjirou closed his eyes in delight at the pleasant, ticklish sensation on his neck, tightening his grip around her. People often likened women to cats, but Aura’s forcefulness didn’t mesh with a comparison to such a gentle creature. Even a leopard wasn’t a good enough reference. She was an apex predator ruling over all she surveyed.

The two of them reveled in each other’s warmth for a while before Aura slipped from his arms and left the bed. Baring her nude form liberally, a body ripe where it should be, and likewise taut, she took a towel from a pail of water by the bed and wiped down her body.

“Phew...”

While they did dry themselves off once they finished the act each night, the blazing temperatures meant that a man and woman sharing a bed would continue to sweat unpleasantly.

“Once you’re done, pass it here, I need to clean off too,” Zenjirou noted, climbing from the bed, still naked, and approaching her. He was rather paler than his wife.

“Very well. Shall I wipe you off myself, Husband?”

Zenjirou was about to give in to the teasing offer, but shook his head. “That’s really tempting, but it’s *too* tempting and I don’t think I’d be able to stop

halfway through. Although if we could go all the way this morning, I'd leap at the chance."

"A shame. Unfortunately, I have work lined up, so I lack the time for that. My apologies, but we must wait until tonight."

While she had been rather at his mercy on their first night, she'd quickly adapted to sex in the ten days since and could now comfortably banter with him. She finished wiping off and dunked the towel in the water before wringing it out and tossing it over.

"Got it. I'll be looking forward to it all day. Actually, what are we doing today? Food-wise?" he asked as he dried himself off.

"Well, it seems I won't have the time to come to the inner palace for breakfast or lunch. If things go well then I may be able to take dinner here. If you wish to eat together, it would be possible for you to come out to the palace," she said as she dressed, looking searchingly at him.

If I did that, I might well bump into a noble other than Aura. I haven't got a clue right now, and if I talked to them carelessly, I might cause some real problems for her, he thought rapidly in response to her gaze.

Her strong, confident personality made it easy to forget, but given the society's patriarchal nature, her rule was by no means absolute. Even if it was unlikely, Zenjirou accidentally saying something that could be seen as criticism or dissatisfaction with his wife would be a rather large impediment for her.

I might be overthinking it, but better safe than sorry.

"Nah, it's too much hassle to go all that way. I'll just laze around here. Oh, I would like to at least learn enough to avoid any cultural embarrassment soon. I won't necessarily be able to stay inside all the time." That was his way of telling her that he'd do as much as he could to avoid hindering her.

"I see," she said, reading his intentions perfectly and giving him a loving smile. "In that case, I shall do my utmost to finish all of my business before the evening meal. You may feel lonely being on your own until tonight, but bear with it. As far as manners and the like go, I would be happy to teach you myself if I only had the time. Very well, I shall arrange for someone suitable to assist

you," she assured him.

"My bad, sorry to be such a bother."

"Worry not, the inconveniences are of my own making."

Aura finally finished dressing, and the two of them approached each other as one.

"I shall see you later, Husband."

"Yeah, have a good day."

This was a real role reversal, he thought, and those thoughts made their way to his face in a wry grin as the couple exchanged a brief kiss. Then Zenjirou watched his wife head out to take on her queenly duties with a smile.

"Now then, what to do today?"

Having seen her off, Zenjirou was wearing a T-shirt and boxers from his old world, and a pair of baggy white pants that were common in this world as he relaxed on the sofa. He'd been rather busy up until then, what with the wedding and getting the generator set up, so his full-blown 'do-nothing lifestyle' finally began now. He might eventually find himself with too much free time on his hands, but for the moment at least, he had a mountain of things that he wanted to do.

As an office worker, he had merely amassed DVDs, never having found the time to watch any of them, and the same went for games, most of which he had never even unwrapped.

He'd continued to buy digital albums by his favorite bands and singers more out of habit than anything since university, but he only listened to music during his commute. There were still lots of tracks he'd never gotten around to hearing.

"I guess I'll start with the TV shows. Ah, but if I start now, I'll be interrupted by breakfast."

Once breakfast arrived, a maid assigned to the inner palace would come and inform him. He was the lord of this palace now, so he could alter the morning

schedule if the fancy took him, but he knew he shouldn't throw his weight around carelessly. After all, this world didn't even have gas stoves or running water, let alone electrical appliances. Having breakfast ahead of schedule would mean that the servants needed to gather the necessary water in less time. Delaying it would mean they'd need to start over to make everything fresh for the new serving time. You couldn't just nuke premade meals in the microwave like you could in Japan.

"And anyway, I've just married into this... getting a bad rep with the workers is way too risky. How much have I got left from what I brought?"

Somewhat peckish, he opened up the fridge and peered inside. Thankfully, the huge machine was working just fine with the power it was pulling from the micro-generator.

The contents currently consisted of fruit and alcohol from this world, and the little bit of food that he'd brought from back home. Of course, the majority of his remaining food was the chocolate, hardtack, beef jerky, biscuits, and so on that he'd stuffed into his rucksack in case something unforeseen happened during the summoning, so there was no real point in keeping it in the fridge.

Other than that, he had the dried plums his aunt made for him to 'take abroad' (as she believed he was doing), the Shinshuu Soba noodles that his uncle had recommended, and the dipping sauce for them as well.

"The chocolate would be a bit of a waste. From what Aura said, they don't even know the cacao plant, so I'll probably never be able to have it again. At least they have plenty of sugar, but it looks like it's pretty unrefined dark stuff."

The substance was probably what they extracted and filtered from sugarcane or another similar plant with high sugar content. It tasted peculiar to Zenjirou, who was used to standard granulated sugar. He'd saved recipes for cakes, cookies, crème caramel, and so on to his computer, but with the types of sugar and flour available here, he doubted he'd be able to make anything decent.

He hadn't brought a mixer or microwave either, so he wouldn't be able to make sweets as easily as back home. If he were to try, he'd pretty much have to call up the person responsible for the kitchens, explain the general method and leave them to it.

He'd meant to gather as much as he possibly could during his month of preparations, but as he now began his new life in this world, there were a multitude of things he lamented not bringing. Chief among them was glass for the windows.

Zenjirou threw open the shutters, letting the hot outside air blow in mercilessly. He looked over at the corner of the room where his air conditioner was sitting and groaned.

"I completely missed that. You've always got rooms with closed windows in Japan, so I never even thought..."

With no glass in the windows, even if he did install the unit, it probably wouldn't be able to maintain the pleasant temperature he desired. With the windows open, an air conditioner was less than half as effective at best.

Unfortunately, shutting them all, blocking out the light and relying on the lamps alone was a tad unhealthy, and even if he did that, the wooden shutters weren't as airtight as glass windows built to modern standards. The room was also huge, so he wondered how much the domestic air conditioner would even be able to lower the temperature.

"I'd probably fail at installing it anyway, so I guess I'll just give up on it," he decided with a sigh, putting the problems of glass and air conditioning out of his mind for the time being.

Fortunately, placing a mass of ice in front of a fan ended up working much better than he'd expected for cooling.

"Well, whatever. Complaining isn't gonna help, so I'll just have fun in spite of it."

His decision made, Zenjirou pulled a storage bag of DVDs out from under the TV and started choosing what he'd like to watch.

"Hmm, how far did I get with this? I think I saw until Solar Car got to the island with the bullfights? And it was the third VS 100 Detective Chase I watched last?"

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While Zenjirou was lolling about watching TV in front of a fan and a hunk of

ice, his wife was in the office performing her work as a queen.

Being a head of state, most of that work revolved around meetings and audiences. Heading both the government and army, as no one was currently filling the role of Prime Minister or Marshall, her days were quite busy.

The free time she had between each meeting and audience was used to read reports she'd been given. As she inspected the sheaf of drake parchment (parchment made from treated dash drake hides), Fabio spoke from where he was standing at her side.

"Your Majesty, it is almost time."

Aura looked up from the parchment at the monotonous report from the slender-faced man. "Hm? Ah, already. Who is next?"

Time was measured much more loosely in this world than in modern Japan considering their lack of timepieces, but matters in the palace were divided into quarters of an hour, or fifteen minutes. As the majority of her work needed to be finished while the sun was up, the queen was as busy as the average politician in Japan during the day.

"Your next appointment is with Commander Pujol Guillén of the Knights."

Hearing that name, an unmistakable grimace made its way across her face. He'd been one of the two candidates for her husband before Zenjirou was summoned. He was indeed a capable soldier, with many successes under his belt in the recent war despite his youth. But in Aura's estimation he was far too ambitious, and so was unsuited to be her partner.

Just what would the man who had the position of 'The Queen's Husband' within his grasp, only to have it torn from him by someone from another world, have to say to her now? Her imagination alone was enough to make her sigh.

"Your Majesty, those who hold the rank of commander or cabinet minister have a right to request a direct audience with the monarch. Lord Pujol is merely exercising a legitimate right of his."

Aura's irritation grew at the calmness of his voice, but logically, she knew that Fabio was correct. "I am aware. Fine, send him in," she ordered in her usual voice and with a dignified expression, having taken a deep breath to ease her

anger.

“Aura, Your Majesty. First, allow me to offer my congratulations on your marriage.”

“My thanks, Sir Pujol. It heartens me to hear that from you. Though we are not to be together as man and wife, I hope to maintain our relationship as sovereign and retainer well into the future.”

“Your praise honors me, ma’am.”

This beginning to their conversation was blatant lip service.

Pujol Guillén could be described as a stereotypical military man. He stood a head taller than Aura, who was already tall for a woman. He had a chiseled, fearless face and the parts of his arms visible below his half-sleeves were littered with scars. The palms of his huge, glove-like hands also had visible calluses from wielding a sword.

If you were to ask someone who was more suitable to be Aura’s spouse based on looks, every single person would be likely to say it was Pujol. He fit better with her visually, his black hair and dark skin complementing with her own red hair and tawny complexion. His height was better suited to her as well, taller than average for a man in the same way she was tall compared to most women.

He was a skilled soldier and a capable commander, a war hero with many victories to boast of. But this hero had lost the chance to marry the queen.

He now looked at his liege and spoke bluntly. “Your Majesty, I believe you are aware, but I have a younger sister. She is weakly connected, much like myself, but she does have the blood of royalty in her veins, significant mana, and the grace and decorum to conduct herself in public. What would your thoughts be on having her become Sir Zenjirou’s concubine to restore the blood of the royal family?”

Aura desperately suppressed the urge to hold her head in her hands in the face of this ambitious man’s sudden and obvious proposal. This was the reason. This all-too-clear ambition was why he was extremely unsuited to be her husband, regardless of his military exploits.

Aura didn't have a personality that lent itself well to settling, so if they had married, there was a strong possibility that the Capua Kingdom would have been split into factions supporting each of them, and it would have created a rift.

Even regardless of that, bringing up concubines to a newly-married woman showed an absolute lack of consideration.

"Hmm, intriguing. And what of your sister's thoughts?" she asked without breaking her composure.

Pujol looked at Aura strangely. "I am the head of the Guillén family."

He wasn't wrong, of course. Marriages for women were decided by the head of their families. He was merely making a call in accordance with the country's traditions.

If anything, it was Aura who had strayed from those traditions by having maintained her queenly disposition. Then again, most family heads *did* take their daughter's and sister's feelings into account to a certain extent when making such decisions. But it appeared that Pujol was taking only his own circumstances into account.

Realizing that the conversation was going in the wrong direction, Aura smiled impassively and moved to change course. "I see. But my husband has only just arrived in this world. He still needs to adjust, both mentally and physically. He is at his limit with me alone."

Pujol narrowed his eyes sharply at her flat rejection. "And is that something Sir Zenjirou has said himself?"

Aura answered rather more haughtily than necessary at her subordinate's rudeness, annoyed that he would question his queen. "Of course. Do you doubt my words?"

"Not at all. Excuse me. However, I do wish to offer my greetings *directly* to Sir Zenjirou, as one titled noble to another. Would you convey that to him *clearly*?"

"Very well. I shall convey *each and every word* to my husband."

"Please do," he said, giving a knight's salute with his right fist to his left

shoulder before withdrawing from the office.

Once she was sure the ambitious commander had left, Aura let out a deep sigh.

“Honestly. His own marriage attempt failed and now he sends out his sister. His attitude is as brazen as ever. How refreshing.” Her tone belied her words as she practically spat her “praise.”

Fabio spoke up, having remained as still as a statue until then. “Sir Pujol’s bluntness does serve us in elucidating the overall feelings of the nobility. There is likely to be a flood of similar proposals in the coming days. Should you continue refusing them in such a way, there will inevitably be rumors that you are restricting your husband’s freedoms to maintain your own power.”

Aura frowned at her secretary’s usual candor and offered her objections. “His shutting himself in the inner palace is nothing but his own choice. I have given him no commands.”

“I am aware. He is wise, and currently outwardly cooperative to the extreme. However, the interaction between the two of you is confined to the inner palace; none of it is visible to the nobles in the palace proper.”

Each and every word he said was true, and Aura couldn’t help but sigh. “So, I shall need to have my husband make his presence known within the palace to some extent. That way, he can demonstrate to them directly that our relationship is going well. It feels much as if I am prevailing upon him, though.”

She was hesitant to push additional hardships onto him after he’d shown her nothing but love. It made her feel like she was doing exactly what the rumors would imply: restricting his freedoms to maintain her own power.

Her secretary, however, paid her melancholy tone no heed and continued speaking with a face that might as well have been carved from granite. “It is unavoidable. Commander Pujol’s suggestion that Sir Zenjirou take a concubine is a sound one when viewed from the perspective of maintaining the royal bloodline.”

“Well, I suppose so...” Aura admitted, unable to disagree. However passionate

they were, there was a limit to the number of children they could have if Zenjirou were to remain monogamous. Aura had the weight of her rule to consider as well, and she couldn't constantly be bearing children.

"What do you truly think?" she asked suddenly. "Do you believe I should accept Commander Pujol's suggestion?"

The middle-aged man's objective point of view, focusing only on the results, was a useful point of reference.

He gave a slight shrug and answered, "My personal perspective could well be taken as an insult to the royal family. I am unable to decide if it is fit for your ears." He bowed his head.

Aura waved her hand unconcernedly, bidding him continue. "Irrelevant. Besides, superficial courtesy is what you thrive on. Even if it angers me, you will not be punished. Speak freely."

The secretary bowed again at being granted permission and began. "First of all, in terms of the overall conclusion, I am against Sir Zenjirou taking Commander Pujol's sister as a concubine."

"Oh?" She leaned forward with interest, surprised by his answer.

"A noble concubine with rare ties to the royal family may seem like it is guaranteeing the next generation of royals, but is actually short-sighted once you consider subsequent generations. After all, if all those with strong ties are Sir Zenjirou's children, even with different women, they will still be half-siblings."

"Ah, I see," she nodded in understanding.

Such an arrangement would certainly increase the number of those with royal blood, but if they had a single father and were half-siblings, it would be exceedingly difficult to find suitable partners for all of them.

Marriages between half-siblings were not forbidden by law in the Capua Kingdom, but neither were they endorsed. They knew from history that children between those too closely related could have difficulties with the mind and body.

“So, thinking simply of the continuation of the royal bloodline, it would be best for Commander Pujol’s sister to marry the other candidate for your hand, Lord Raffaello of the Márquez family. At the same time, if Sir Zenjirou were to take a gifted mage or suitable noblewoman as his concubine and produce a branch family, then nothing ill would be said. Sir Zenjirou has strong enough relations that we might expect such a child to even inherit space-time magic. Of course, this is all predicated on the two of you producing an heir.”

Aura’s lips twisted into a sardonic smile as she listened to her secretary’s speech. “So, as far as you are concerned, marriages between royalty and nobles are much the same as breeding dash drakes.”

The slender secretary remained unmoved by her cynicism. “Hence my warning that my view would seem rude. Besides, this is merely in consideration of how to increase the number of people with space-time magic. Marriage is entwined with the heart, and carelessly matching members of the Guillén and Márquez households for marriage would lead to the creation of a family with far too much influence and could lead to rebellion.”

“I know, and I must take those consequences into account before making a final decision. But that means that my husband will at some point need to formally face the nobility, or even more distrust will be brought to bear against me.”

Aura rested her chin on her hand and thought for a while before suddenly looking up at the official.

“Fabio, how long can he stay shut up within the inner palace while keeping the nobility’s distrust manageable?”

“I would suggest a month at least, and six at the longest. Should it continue much beyond that, whatever he says will be discarded as you having made him say it,” he answered smoothly, as if he’d expected the sudden question.

“One month... Well, I suppose so. Right, fortunately, he has asked to learn the customs and norms of this world. Let us find a tutor for him.”

“A tutor? Even though men are forbidden in the inner palace?”

Aura smiled meaningfully in response to his probing. “Of course, the tutor will

be a woman. I would also like him to be taught the basics of magic at the same time, so it will have to be someone more skilled than average as a mage."

A skilled female mage to tutor him... If people heard that, it could be interpreted as Aura officially looking for concubine candidates. So she added a warning.

"If there are no suitable candidates, I shall ask the old woman. I only pray that no one too bold presents themselves for the position."

The "old woman" referred to the head mage's wife, Pasquala. If people still recommended young, unmarried women after hearing that a married mage in her seventies was being considered, it would mean they were either too stupid to realize what Aura wanted, or so ambitious that they prioritized a gain in influence over their queen's request.

The man beside her gave a slight, troubled shrug and offered some final advice. "Your Majesty, if you test your subordinates so bluntly, you will lose the hearts of the people. Take care."

"I know. I am not ignoring your suggestion for my husband to take a concubine and create a branch family. But I must first uncover the more troublesome candidates."

It was indeed something that Aura was loath to consider with their newly-married life going so well, so a little displeasure was understandable. She understood the need for royalty to marry for political convenience, but even royals wanted to keep love for themselves.

"Truly, there is no harm in enjoying our new marriage alone for a while," she said unhappily with a shrug.

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That night, after having dinner, Aura and Zenjirou were cuddling together on the sofa, relaxing.

"Hmm, the danger of the late hour aside, spending the nights like this becomes far more pleasant with such bright illumination," Aura noted in appreciation, looking over at the six lamps lighting the room.

“Haha, you’re right. I’m pretty used to it, though, so it doesn’t feel that special to me,” he replied.

Aura had seen to her duties during the day, but once the sun set, she was relatively free. Of course, there were one or two balls a week that she had to attend, so there was no guarantee that she was free to do as she pleased on any given night. When Zenjirou compared it to his time as an office worker, though, the end of her workday still ended up being quite early as far as he was concerned.

Thanks to that, he and Aura were able to spend the evening alone as husband and wife. That said, being the queen’s husband, it was impossible to escape the political bent that conversations ended up taking, even if they were relaxing while they spoke.

“So, you’ve put out an appeal for a tutor to teach me the customs and norms here?” he confirmed after hearing the details of her decision that afternoon, not particularly surprised.

“Indeed,” his wife answered with a distinguished expression. “It will take some time for a decision to be made. In the interim, I shall teach you whenever I am free. I would have preferred to teach you everything myself, but as I said, I lack the time. My apologies.”

“It’s fine, seriously. I know you’re busy. But... it’ll be okay, right? I can’t promise I won’t say something weird to them.”

Worrying about using the right tone and so on with someone who was there to teach you manners and cultural norms might be putting the cart before the horse, but it was a valid concern. A person chosen to be the prince consort’s tutor would have a certain amount of status of their own, so it was possible that interacting carelessly could lead to him falling into ill repute within the palace.

Aura shook her head at those worries with a smile. “No, your usual speech will be sufficient to begin with. I shall be drilling you with the bare minimum of etiquette until your tutor is decided,” she said brightly to assuage his worries.

“Ahaha, go easy on me,” he replied with a strained laugh, just as a knock came from the door.

“Yes?” Zenjirou answered automatically.

“Excuse me, the bath is ready,” called a familiar maid’s voice.

“Huh? Oh, yeah, it’s about that time. Got it, I’ll be there soon,” he returned, standing from the sofa and picking up a lamp from the shelf.

Zenjirou had been shocked by the depth of the darkness when going to bathe for the first time, so he’d bought the lantern from a local home center during his brief trip home. It would usually require four D cells, but he was using spacers that let his rechargeable AAs work in their place. It was far too dangerous for an amateur to install electricity in a room full of water, so this was all he had to rely on for his baths.

Regardless, the lantern had twenty-eight mini LEDs and managed to light up the room so that it was “still gloomy, but bearable,” as far as he was concerned.

The maids and Aura, however, found it unbelievably bright.

“Right, it’s fine, looks like it doesn’t need charging yet,” he confirmed after switching it on to check. He picked it up and headed for the door.

“Let us go then, Zenjirou,” Aura said, taking the arm of his that was not occupied with the lantern and holding it to her chest.

“Umm, so you mean... we’re bathing together?” Despite sharing a bed, they had yet to share a bath.

Aura smiled bewitchingly at her husband, as flustered by her daring suggestion as he was. “Assuming you do not object, yes.”

“I couldn’t object to that, it’s way too attractive to refuse,” he declared, a lecherous look on his face as he practically floated towards the bath chamber, his arm still happily in Aura’s hands.

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Once the two of them had fully enjoyed their bath, they each poured a glass of their favorite booze and soothed their flushed bodies in front of the improvised cooler. Zenjirou had a can of low-malt beer that you’d buy by the case, and Aura had the remnants of the white wine from the night before. Both drinks had been chilled by the fridge and nicely soothed their dry throats.

“I could get used to this,” Aura said, sighing happily, her eyes closing in pleasure at the sensation of the cold wine in the glass and the cool wind from the fan on her body.

She was clad in thin nightclothes, luxuriating in a cold breeze from an electric fan, and drinking cold wine in the ever-oppressive nights of Capua. It was a luxury not even the nobility would normally have. Although she was used to the climate here, it didn’t mean that Aura wasn’t uncomfortable in the sweltering heat.

“This is bad... I need to stay strong or I shall eventually shut myself up here as well.”

“Go right ahead. Or at least, that’s what I’d like to say, but a queen can’t do that. Well, come back whenever you have the time; I’ll always be here to welcome you,” he replied to her joke.

“Very well, I shall take my lunch here as often as I am able, so please do,” she answered, deciding to increase the amount of time she spent here, as if it had not entirely been said in jest.

“Got it, I’ll make sure there’s some ice for lunchtime then,” he assured her with a smile.

However big the fridge was, it couldn’t provide enough ice to leave in front of the fan twenty-four seven. He would have to economize to a certain extent so that he didn’t end up having no ice if she came back to see him. Temperatures soared to over 37°C at midday. And once the air got above body temperature, the fan on its own just blew hot wind around and didn’t cool very well.

It would be at least a little better with a container of water, even if he didn’t have enough ice, but it wouldn’t cool anywhere near as well that way. He seriously wanted an AC.

With the flush from the bath as well as her parched throat finally dealt with, Aura turned to Zenjirou with a slightly tense expression. “I regret needing to say this despite telling you that you would have no responsibilities here, but let us start the lecture now. First, we shall cover the general responses of royalty.”

“Uh... huh? We’re starting tonight?” Zenjirou asked in surprise.

“Of course,” she answered with a placid smile. “We have such brilliant lighting, so we should put the night to good use.”

With those words, she turned to peer into his eyes where he sat next to her. For his part, Zenjirou looked up at the ceiling with a bitter expression.

“Maann, the precious free time I get to spend with you is being used for studying.”

Aura’s expression was embarrassed for a brief moment at his frank response, but it returned to normal before Zenjirou’s gaze left the ceiling as she answered, “I am glad to hear that you enjoy our time together, but we have a deadline. Worry not, though, I shall not allow it to intrude on our time in the bedroom.”

“Well, I guess there’s no choice. Although I’d like to use the time you’re *not* here to study... Oh? Wait a minute...”

Once he put his nonsensical wish into words, Zenjirou seemed to remember something and stood up. He walked towards a corner of the room where he had collected the things he had brought from Japan.

“I’m sure I brought it. It’s small, so it must have fallen onto the carpet...”

“Zenjirou?”

“Great, there it is, it’s this,” he said, finding the object and returning to the sofa with a silver cuboid in his hand.

“What is that?” Aura asked with a confused look.

“It’s a digicam. That’s short for ‘digital camera.’ It’s to take photographs, originally... still images, I mean, but it does video as well, with sound too,” he said, lifting the device.

Aura just tilted her head, uncomprehending. “Photographs? Still images? Video? With sound? What do you mean?”

He considered how to explain it for a moment but couldn’t find the words to do so. Explaining such technology to someone who had no concept of it was surprisingly difficult.

“How can I put it? It takes a really detailed picture of something in an instant,

and saves voices and moving pictures to create a recording.”

“A recording? Saves how?”

Even the simplified explanation didn’t mesh with her existing knowledge, so he figured he wouldn’t easily be able to put it into words.

“I guess I’ll just show you. Would you start explaining the manners and such you were talking about a second ago?” he asked, turning the camera on and pointing it at her.

“Hmm...” she murmured, looking dubiously at the strange tool, but decided to trust him as she stood up and began to speak. “I do not fully understand, but very well. I shall begin with the basics, then.

“Normally, it is rare for a member of the royal family to come into contact with someone of higher standing in public. With that in mind, I wish to teach you how to interact with those of lower and equal rank. Fundamentally, the first one to speak should be the subordinate. Generally, they will...”

Aura went on with her instruction of how manners in Capua worked, gesturing as she spoke, while Zenjirou kept the camera rolling. He’d bought it during his first year of work, so he’d used it a fair bit, but he’d only taken a few videos out of curiosity early on.

He didn’t know whether it was recording properly, or whether it could pick up her voice from this distance. There were several things that concerned him, but he didn’t need to think too deeply about it. If it failed, he’d deal with it then. Not capturing a perfect recording didn’t mean it would be of no use whatsoever.

He kept the camera on his wife as she described the basics of local etiquette.

“And that should be sufficient to start with. Did you take all that in, Zenjirou?”

As Aura stopped her explanation, Zenjirou did the same with his recording. “Right, thanks, Aura. Now I just need to see if it worked. Sorry, it’s hard to put it into words, so wait just a second,” he told her before moving over to the desk where his computer sat.

He quickly woke it up and took the SD card out of the camera, sliding it into

the slot.

“Hmm, it still is not clear to me, but I assume this is another tool from your world?” Aura asked, coming to stand behind him as he fiddled with the machine.

“Yeah, it is. Erm, I guess I’ll check that it actually recorded before I copy it off the card,” he answered, opening the file directly from the SD card.

Several seconds passed, then the display showed a familiar room with a tawny-skinned woman with red hair speaking animatedly in the middle of the frame.

“Oh, how surprising! This is me. The words are exactly what I said as well. How does this device work? I do not think I have seen such an item even in the Twin Kingdoms!” she exclaimed in wonder, but Zenjirou couldn’t answer her.

He was currently even more surprised than Aura, who was seeing a video for the first time in her life.

“Normalmente, es raro que un miembro de la familia real entre en contacto con alguien de mayor rango en público. Como consecuencia, deseo enseñarte las interacciones con personas de rango inferior e igual...”

“What on Earth...?”

The words coming from the screen were in a language he couldn’t make heads or tails of.

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Unable to understand Aura’s words as the recording was playing back, he admitted as much to his wife, and she looked back at him curiously.

“So, though this tool takes in the sound, it cannot absorb the soul of the language? I cannot feel any mana coming from it, after all.”

“Huh? The soul of the language?” he parroted in response to the unfamiliar term, his expression completely befuddled.

She looked strangely at his expression for a while before realizing that there seemed to be a fundamental issue with his understanding of the situation. “Wait, Zenjirou, let us talk this through in order. First, what is it that has you

surprised?”

He couldn’t hide his confusion. “It’s because I couldn’t understand you at all from the camera, even though I normally can... come to think of it, I guess this is another world, so being able to communicate in Japanese this whole time was weird.”

He hadn’t questioned it at all until then, despite the month and a half he’d spent there since the transition.

“Right, that is where our knowledge clashes. Zenjirou, is it possible that people using different languages in your own world cannot converse?”

It seemed so obvious that he wanted to reply with exactly that, but he kept the exclamation silent. “Yeah, I thought that was obvious, but from the way you said it, I guess it’s different here?”

“Indeed. This world has countries and races with many different languages. Even here on the Southern Continent, there are very different languages in the North, South, East, and West, but they are no obstacle to holding a conversation. That is because sounds that people have the same awareness of contain the ‘soul’ of the language.

“This is perhaps one of the most common pieces of knowledge in this world, so I felt no need to explain it before, but it would seem that you require such a clarification. This may take some time, so let us have a seat.”

She directed Zenjirou to the sofa to begin a more detailed explanation of an everyday fact of her world: “the soul of language.”

Having retaken his seat and listened to Aura’s lengthy description, he went through it mentally and summarized what he’d learned to make sure that he understood.

“So, words in this world have a ‘soul,’ which means that even people using different languages have no impediment to understanding each other?”

“Indeed. This world has essentially no instances of ‘communication difficulties,’” she nodded.

Zenjirou had some questions that he couldn't resolve on his own, and fired them off. "Uh, then if things are so convenient here, isn't learning language itself unnecessary? You know, you could just kinda grunt and get the meaning across."

The question was blunt, but Aura shook her head. "No, you would not. The soul is something that is based on 'cognizance of the correct meaning of a word held by many people.' A newborn may cry and have the meaning of 'breasts' within its cry, but it is a meaning held only by the child, so the soul does nothing. Something on the order of a thousand people would need to recognize the cry as meaning 'breasts.'"

"Huh. Wait, so if a mean adult taught a small child that a 'desk' was called a 'chair,' and vice versa, if that child spoke to someone that had a different language, they'd only hear 'chair' even if they meant a desk?"

"Indeed. The soul that dwells within the words is simply 'what the shared cognizance of the word means.' It has nothing to do with what the *speaker* believes."

"I see... Then why couldn't I understand the recording? It reproduced the sounds correctly, didn't it?"

Aura nodded at his natural question and offered her own hypothesis. "I believe that to be because the tool lacks mana. We are unaware of it during our day-to-day-life, but the soul of language that allows us to come to an understanding uses small amounts of mana. Sounds without mana have no soul active within them, even if they are correct."

Her explanation was easy enough to understand. He nodded repeatedly, clarifying further. "I see, right... So, are there not many people here who can speak multiple languages? You only need one language and you get the translation from that, so learning a second language must be difficult."

By the methods of this world, if an American said "apple," a Japanese person would automatically hear "ringo." That would make it practically impossible for a Japanese person to later learn English.

Aura seemed to pick up on his thoughts and nodded deeply. "Indeed, because of this, the only people who learn multiple languages are a few mages. An

experienced mage can consciously stop the emission of their mana, like this: Te quiero, cariño.”

Just like with the earlier words played from his computer, Zenjirou could no longer understand her.

“You need to be taught by a foreign mage who can control their mana this way. Conversely, if you yourself can control your mana and halt its flow, the soul no longer functions. It requires both the speaker and the listener to have mana. Also, there are places where the invocation of mana itself is inhibited. The soul of language does not work in those locations.”

If Aura was correct, then the entirety of Earth was one of those places, or Earthlings were simply a race with almost no mana at all. Either way, his ancestors a century and a half before had likely faced significant difficulties. They were people for whom the very concept of communication difficulties was non-existent, thrust into a world where they could communicate with no one. It was a miracle they had been able to survive to have children.

“Huh, so learning other languages here is pretty tough and doesn’t really offer much. But there are still mages who go out of their way to do so? Why? It doesn’t seem like you need it.”

Aura nodded again, answering with a smile. “It is more to learn the characters than the words. The characters are representations of pronunciations. Learning the characters without being able to speak is difficult. The characters have no soul if you do not learn them. For instance, you would be unable to read texts from other countries.”

“Ah, right. Actually, I’ve not seen any writing in this world yet. Could you show me some?” he asked, taking the opportunity to pass her a sheet of paper and a ballpoint pen.

“Hmm, this is particularly thin and white parchment. The pen has a strange shape too. Where is the inkpot?”

“Oh, no. This is made from wood, not animal hide. The pen is called a ballpoint and you can write just by pressing it down. The ink is already inside it.”

She was confused at first, handling modern writing implements for the first

time, but a ballpoint wasn't particularly difficult to use compared to a dip pen, so she soon got used to it and responded with admiration.

"Oh, this is most convenient! Not needing to constantly dip the pen into ink is a great help, but even more importantly, it moves so smoothly over even this thin parchment, I can write without catching my pen and tearing it."

"The paper aside, I've got dozens of ballpoints. Why not take a few? I've got other colors too, like red and blue."

"I would greatly appreciate that. I shall take you up on it. All right, I am done. These are the thirty characters that are used within the Western region of the Southern Continent centering on this country."

She showed him a set of unfamiliar symbols written on the paper.

"Huh, I expected it, but they really are phonetic. There are thirty, so I wonder if they're close to the Latin alphabet? Hey, Aura, try writing 'a,' 'i,' 'u,' 'e,' and 'o,' then 'a,' 'ka,' 'sa,' 'ta,' and 'na.'"

"Hm, what? Sorry, but would you repeat that?"

"Yeah, we'll go one at a time. First was 'a...'"

Fortunately, the short sounds with no meaning were conveyed to Aura as he said them. While she wrote them down, he could tell that they were mostly similar to the alphabet in his original world. There was no clear linguistic division between vowels and consonants, but they formed diphthongs with several characters for a single sound that accomplished the same. However, there was no distinction between R and L (there was no character that corresponded to L), there were several characters that corresponded with M, and various other differences. However, the majority of the characters could be represented with the alphabet.

The other clear difference was probably the lack of an upper and lower case. It made recording slight nuances more difficult, but it was probably easier to learn fewer characters.

"It looks like learning these thirty characters should be simple enough. Though learning how sentences are constructed is more complicated. Maybe it'd be more helpful to start with numbers? Aura, while you're at it, could you

teach me the numbers from this world?” he asked casually as he added pronunciation guides for himself to each of the thirty symbols.

However, the queen’s reaction startled him. “Numbers? You want to know what numbers look like when they are written? I do think that learning all of the numbers at once would be rather difficult...” As she spoke, she took another piece of paper and began writing. “This is ‘one,’ this is ‘two,’ and this is ‘three.’ I think it would be better to limit ourselves to ten to begin with. Merchants and military personnel aside, it is far from rare to see people who don’t recognize a million or billion.”

Zenjirou fell silent and looked at the paper. There were several characters corresponding to each number she had mentioned, making it look like she had written entire words. Almost like writing “one,” “two,” and “three” in English instead of the numerals themselves.

“Does this world not have numerals?” He wanted to say it was impossible, but it wasn’t all that unlikely.

In Japan, before they learned Arabic numerals, they would use the Chinese characters for numbers, counting rods, or abaci for more complicated calculations. They had early simultaneous equations like *tsurukamezan*, which used the sum of the number of legs to find the number of cranes and tortoises, or Pythagoras’s theorem to calculate the depth of a body of water by the distance a floating plant tethered to the bottom could be moved. Apparently, it wasn’t unheard of to find far more complex calculations than expected if you inspected documents from stock manifests belonging to merchants and daimyo.

With that in mind, it wasn’t that a lack of numerals was automatically equated to a lack of mathematics. After all, it was unlikely that such a huge palace had been created with no higher mathematics at all. If, against all likelihood, the palace had just been built by way of experience, then that was even more absurd. It would be true magic.

However, the existence, or lack thereof, of Arabic numerals would have a clear influence on the mathematical abilities of the lower class. To raise the base level of proficiency with calculations, the ten digits including zero were indispensable.

“So, by numerals you mean characters that explicitly denote the numbers? Intriguing. What advantages do they have?” Aura asked interestedly, prompting a passionate explanation from Zenjirou on the invaluable nature of numerals.

“Right, the first thing is that they are easy to learn. With the decimal system, if you learn ten numbers, including zero, you can write down *any* number. If you add four symbols for addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division then most people can learn basic arithmetic in two or three years.”

“Yes, yes...” she nodded along.

Zenjirou had completely forgotten his self-imposed resolution to avoid making waves here as much as possible as he explained Earth’s number system to the queen.

Chapter 5 — Peaceful Time Passes

Several days had passed since Zenjirou had learned of “the soul of language.”

The temperature in the kingdom had risen by the day, and the year had finally entered its hottest season. He didn’t know the exact temperature, having turned the thermometer around for the sake of his mental health once he saw it pass 40°C. Judging from the feel of the air, the temperature had risen even higher since then, but he couldn’t muster the courage to flip the thermometer back around to check.

For the past few days, he’d shut all the windows and spent his time in the LED lights, despite having considered it “unhealthy” before. The blistering heat was not solely a source of misery, though. During this time of the year, when the heat was bad enough that it could kill, the palace had a roughly three-hour recess in the afternoon. So the past few days had provided him the opportunity to spend time with his wife not just at night, but also during the day.

“Phew, it’s so hot. Compared to the office, this might as well be paradise,” was the first thing out of the queen’s mouth as she shut the door and headed straight for the fridge.

“Hey, Aura, working hard today?” he called from where he was lying on the sofa, playing with a handheld console.

“Indeed,” she responded, scooping ice out of the ice maker and putting it into the nearby crusher with familiar movements.

Humming to herself with a placid smile, she spun the handle and created a mound of crushed ice in a glass container before taking a bottle of strawberry syrup from the fridge and pouring it liberally over the frozen chips.

“Aura! You’re using too much!” Zenjirou protested, having caught sight of her from the corner of his eye.

His wife, however, was completely unperturbed as she answered, “Do not be so miserly; there is no harm in me having some.” With that, she recapped the

bottle and returned it to the fridge, heading over to where Zenjirou was relaxing, her glass of ice in one hand.

“There definitely is! It’s harming our supply!”

Even as he protested, he flicked his console shut and rearranged himself on the sofa so that she could sit down. Going out of his way to make room for her despite the empty couch opposite him implied that the marriage was going fairly well.

Aura took a long-handled spoon and lifted the ice, now bright red with the syrup, to her mouth. “Worry not, the chefs are currently making a similar confection using fruits and dark sugar.”

Her confident declaration drew his interest. “Oh, is it good?”

If they were adding sugar to fruit and boiling it down then that could result in something similar to jam. In that case, it would work as a substitute for the syrup.

Despite his hopeful question, however, her gaze remained on her ice, evasive. “So, I shall have this, and you may take advantage of the diligence of our kitchen staff later.”

“Come on, does it taste good?”

“Oh, my head is ringing. I cannot get enough of these cold rushes.”

“Yeah, right, I bet whatever they’re doing downstairs still tastes pretty bad...”

The queen looked a bit guilty at her husband’s reproachful stare, diverting her eyes as she relented. “Indeed... your world’s cuisine far outstrips our own. It appears it will be difficult to replicate these items precisely.”

Zenjirou let out a sigh at her confession. He hadn’t expected much, but it was disappointing to hear nonetheless. “Then we should make it last. I only brought the three bottles: one strawberry, one melon, and one blue Hawaii,” he told her.

“Indeed, I shall take care of the strawberry.”

“But strawberry’s my favorite too—ah, whatever,” he conceded, withdrawing his objections with a shrug. Considering his bed and board were all provided by

his wife, letting her have her way with things like this was key to a happy marriage.

He put his console on the table and headed over to the fridge himself, pulling out a damp towel that had been chilling inside and tossing it to Aura as she finished eating.

“For the sweat.”

“Oh, my thanks.”

The sudden intake of fluid had made her perspire, so she took the towel and quickly wiped off her face and body.

There was a brief silence. While it was only noon, the room currently had its shutters closed to ward off the heat and was lit only by the lamps instead. It almost seemed like it was night, and seeing his beloved wife wiping herself off, despite her being fully clothed, Zenjirou’s lust naturally began to build.

Aura noticed his unabashed gaze and gave a sultry smile as she shifted to face away from him. “It seems I have done nothing but partake of the bounty you brought with you. Then, though I claimed you would have no obligations in your new life here, I am now having you learn manners, etiquette, and magic.”

From her perspective, it was a simple truth. Each day, she had cold drinks and was able to cool herself in front of the fan. She had no memories of experiencing such pleasant days during this time of the year before—a season even hotter than the rest of what was already a very summery year. If she had to compare it to something, she’d probably recall the summers of her youth, spent in the royal family’s resort near a highland lake.

“You don’t need to worry about it,” he told her. “It was all stuff I wanted to use up. And as for the rest, even if you were brought up in another country, you should make an effort to learn the customs if you settle somewhere else, so I was prepared for that.”

Zenjirou’s reply was likewise the truth as he saw it. Although Aura had promised there would be no need for him to do anything, he’d been well aware that he wouldn’t be able to live like a lapdog, just eating, sleeping, and playing.

History on Earth had frequent instances of concubines being pulled into the

public eye for official events, despite normally remaining secluded. Taking that into account, it was inevitable that he would need to learn at least basic etiquette and the country's history to avoid bringing shame upon the royal family.

Besides, "work" in this world, where waking hours were dictated by the sun, was hardly demanding when he used to consider getting home before midnight to be "early."

But Aura had no way of intuiting any of that, so once she was done toweling off and had discarded the fabric onto the table, she pressed her husband as he continued his self-effacement.

"Say, Zenjirou, do you truly not feel confined? I know you are refusing contact with others due to understanding my own circumstances, and it is indeed a great help to me. Yet still, I feel aggrieved that I cannot give anything back to you while you continue to have your freedoms restricted."

It had been a little under a month since their marriage. That time had made Aura well aware of her husband's grasp on their positions based on his lack of selfish requests and determination to avoid causing trouble. She knew that he was restraining himself as much as possible in order to steer clear of any problems.

He was also well regarded by the inner palace staff, such as the maids and the chefs assigned to the area. He was a master who didn't cause them extra work and was neither egocentric nor overbearing. There surely wasn't anyone else who could be so easy to serve.

After questioning them, Aura had actually warned the maids, who had instinctively arrayed themselves around the head maid, not to take the current situation at face value. Humans were creatures who could adapt to anything. It was surprisingly common for maids who'd grown accustomed to an undemanding lord to be unable to deal with a sudden bout of selfishness from them later on. Still, for the moment, her otherworldly husband seemed to be paying excessive attention to his surroundings and had a habit of suppressing his desires.

Yet Zenjirou wasn't bothered. He had no particular demands. He did wish to

leave the inner palace, but didn't intend to push it when he considered the issues that doing so could cause. And while he was unhappy with the heat and food, there was nothing that Aura could do about it.

He knew that his self-sufficiency and extreme "understanding" might be strange to her, but Zenjirou had been brought up as part of the masses, and his sense of values was such that being selfish was deemed vulgar. So he was comfortable letting things be.

"Well, I'm happy enough for now. I'll make sure to tell you if there's anything I'm *not* happy about," he told her.

"I do not refer only to dissatisfaction; I wish for you to tell me if there is anything at all that you desire. Well, regardless, you need not refrain from voicing any concerns. I wish to reward your devotion, even if only a little," Aura replied with a kind smile.

That smile fanned his feelings for her even as he felt a thrill of playfulness. A glance at the clock showed that it was 1:03 PM. Her midday break from the intense heat would last until about 3:30.

Right, all good, plenty of time, he thought to himself as he approached the sofa where she sat.

"Okay, fine. If you insist... then pay with your body!" he yelled jokingly, leaping at her.

Aura immediately realized his intentions as he threw himself forward to embrace her and spread her own arms as well, catching him. She held him there, completely stopping him before tightening her grip.

"Very well..."

She entwined her arms around his back and fervently pressed her lips into his. If he wanted a passionate embrace and ardent kissing, then that was easily done; she would just need to accept it.

His reaction, however, contradicted her expectations. Each night when they embraced this way, he would deepen their kisses and allow his hands to roam her body. Yet now her husband was as motionless as a doll.

“What is wrong, Zenjirou?” she asked, putting her doubts into words as they broke their kiss.

Her husband didn’t answer and simply moved away from her before crouching in a corner of the room.

“Zenjirou?” she prompted. “Why are you fiddling with the carpet over there with such a gloomy expression?”

She was utterly bewildered, needing to understand what had caused his abrupt change when she had thought all he wanted was a passionate embrace.

Zenjirou answered despondently as he twirled his finger around. “I mean, yeah, I didn’t go all out, you know? And I wasn’t trying to seriously tackle you or anything. But still, I tried to push my wife down onto the sofa and you stopped me head-on, and didn’t even notice that I tried to...”

Zenjirou didn’t consider himself particularly macho, and didn’t bother much with taking pride in his physical strength, but his wife stopping his body blow like it was nothing made him feel somewhat sad as a man.

“Ah...” Aura’s face stiffened at his admission. *Curses,* she thought, *I knew he was being more energetic than usual. So, he intended to push me down.*

The queen’s body had been tempered by many years as a combatant, so in spite of her husband’s advantage in height, she could easily halt a blow from an amateur like him. And this world was more patriarchal than Japan. It saw strength as a virtue, making Aura feel the sorrow of her husband’s shame even more keenly than he himself did.

What should I do? she fretted, aware that she had quite embarrassed him. Then...

“Aahh!” she cried out, falling back onto the sofa.

“It’s a bit late! Besides, I don’t remember using some sort of delayed tackle!”

“Ahh!” she pointedly cried again, ignoring his retort as she lay on the sofa.

“I mean, come on...”

“Ahh!”

He fell silent as he looked at Aura sprawled out there, the slit of her dress riding up her leg and exposing her cocoa thighs. It was a familiar sight, one that he saw every night, but was still very welcome.

“Hi-yah!” he yelled after a moment, deciding to accept this “time-delayed tackle,” and positioned himself above her.

“Ahh?!”

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Roughly an hour later, having worked up a good sweat on the sofa, the two of them transitioned to studying, still half-naked.

Zenjirou was sitting in front of his laptop in a pair of swim trunks while Aura stood behind him and to the side, clad in a small pair of shorts with a towel around her neck.

There was a sheaf of drake parchment next to the computer, with last year’s tax breakdown for the different regions of the Capuan Kingdom written upon it. The documents were mostly composed of places, names, and amounts, so Aura felt they were the best option for learning the characters and respective pronunciations that were used in this world.

Zenjirou didn’t entirely buy that concept, but dutifully recorded Aura pointing to the words and reading them aloud, then entered the data into a spreadsheet on his laptop. He had finished encoding each of the thirty characters the country used a few days ago, and had assigned each of them to the keys on his computer. It was horribly inefficient as he had to select the special characters every time he pushed the keys, but at least it let him use the new language on his computer.

All of this meant that when he took the records from Aura, added pronunciation guides and Arabic numerals to it, he had some very useful study materials to pore over on his own. It seemed likely that Aura had an ulterior motive in giving him last year’s tax records, but his education was the most obvious reason for it.

“So, Zenjirou, are they finished?”

“Yeah, I completed adding everything in yesterday, and I’m just printing it out

now," he answered.

He sent the fruits of his labor from the past several days (his spreadsheet) to the printer. It was something he had brought along as an afterthought, since it seemed a waste to just throw it away. He only had three precious cartridges of each ink color, but they'd dry up if he didn't use them anyway, so he wasn't stingy about it, setting the machine to print last night's data at high quality.

Aura watched in interest as the printer automatically spewed out paper, picking up the pile once it stopped and casting her eyes over it.

"Now, let us test whether your pronunciations are correct. Zenjirou, read from the first line, would you?"

"Sure, I'll start now. The first entry is from the County of Aubeniz. The yields were sheets of drake parchment numbering one thousand, sacks of wheat numbering two thousand, lumber numbering..."

He continued to read from the display as Aura kept track on the printout. She nodded along, prompting him where necessary and pointing out any issues.

"Ah, that is not Viscount Bonija, it is Viscount Bonilla."

"Right, it's a 'lla' rather than a 'ja.'"

Names of places and people were proper nouns, which mean they weren't part of the "soul of language" and therefore let him hear the intended pronunciations. So it was a good way for him to become familiar with the characters in general.

It also had the benefit of making sure that he would learn the names of those on the reports preferentially. From that perspective, it couldn't be called a coincidence that Aura had chosen to use recent tax records in his study of their writing system.

After a few hundred words, even though they were in unfamiliar letters, he would be able to more or less read. Regardless, this world wouldn't have textbooks like Japan did. There were no materials optimized for those just learning the language. It might be inefficient, but it would get him used to it all by brute force.

As Zenjirou was winding down, Aura finally voiced a question. “I noticed there are some numbers written in red, and some in green. What does that mean?”

He smiled unusually slyly at her question. “Oh, those show where there’s a difference in what was written and what the spreadsheet calculated it should be. It makes them easier to spot. When they’re red, it’s lower than expected, and when it’s green, it’s higher.”

“Oh...” Aura mused at his answer, her expression carefully controlled.

These may have been documents submitted to royalty, but the staff couldn’t check every number themselves. After all, there were so many. Recalculating them all would cost a huge amount of manpower and parchment.

Usually, a cursory check was carried out for anything clearly anomalous before checking several sheets at random, although even those random checks *somehow* seemed to be rarely carried out on the records of influential nobles or estates that had good relations with the examiners.

Zenjirou could use his spreadsheets at will, though, so he was able to easily carry out those kinds of calculations. After all, it simply required making a template and then inputting the data correctly. Anyone who had done a certain amount of office work would be capable of the process.

“Zenjirou, may I borrow this?” Aura asked.

He had been expecting such a question and smiled as blandly as possible as he answered, scratching his head. “Sure. Don’t be too harsh. Well, guess that’s none of my business, really.”

“I will not,” she replied with a ghastly smile on her face.

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That afternoon, Aura was alone in her office with Fabio when she took out the collection of papers she had received from Zenjirou earlier. The secretary remained expressionless, raising an eyebrow slightly.

“What is this, Your Majesty?” he inquired.

“The nobility’s tax records from the previous year. I arranged for my husband to examine them in order for it to act as a guideline for national politics, under

the pretense of him using it to learn our writing system. He recalculated it all perfectly over the last several days and has identified issues with some of the values."

"Did he, now?" Fabio murmured, wariness entering his eyes.

Aura couldn't contain a reluctant smile at his ever-present caution towards Zenjirou. "As suspicious of my husband as ever, I see. I still do not believe he has ambitions you need to worry about."

Despite nodding in agreement, Fabio's answer was stiff. "I am inclined to agree, Your Majesty. My judgment of his actions over the past month suggests that he is unlikely to have ambitions in the political sphere. Yet however low the possibility may be, I cannot definitively say that there is none at all. From what I know of his knowledge and culture, his lack of ambition is rather improbable. I cannot ignore the possibility that his behavior until now has been a well-crafted ruse."

From Fabio's perspective, Zenjirou's attitude was unnatural. A commoner in his position would likely be unable to understand the situation he had been placed in. A noble, on the other hand, would surely have ambitions that corresponded with his abilities and position. A man who understood the ramifications he would have on his surroundings as the queen's spouse and yet meticulously avoiding harming her political capital was a far-fetched idea.

Of course, it was inevitable that someone from another culture would have different customs, and perhaps his behavior was perfectly normal in his own world. But if he was merely feigning cooperation (and it would be impossible to absolutely deny the possibility of him plotting in secret), they needed someone to maintain a vigilant stance.

"You likely need not concern yourself, Your Majesty. It is exceedingly difficult for someone to hide their thoughts from one with whom they eat and sleep. I will continue my own observations in your stead."

"Very well, I shall trouble you with it."

"Indeed, my troubles have been unending since I became your aide," he agreed wholeheartedly at her appreciative words.

“Would the phrase not usually be something like, ‘Not at all, Your Majesty,’ or ‘For you, Your Majesty, it is no trouble at all,’ if only for formality’s sake?” she asked, a strained smile on her face.

“My duty is to tell things as they are,” he replied with dignity, his face still inscrutable as he shrugged.

Indeed, his blunt reports had been of great help to her on many occasions, so she could hardly refute him. She let out a breath and returned to the topic at hand.

“The ‘numerals’ that my husband’s world uses are quite convenient. I believe it would be advantageous if we could adopt them in some way.”

While Zenjirou had been learning the Capuan writing system, Aura had been learning how to read and use numerals from him. Of course, in contrast to his need to learn the local language, Aura only needed to study ten numbers, from zero to nine, so she had mastered the system quickly. While she couldn’t yet use them for calculations, she had internalized them enough to understand the numerals when they were written.

The tax records she had borrowed from Zenjirou made the system’s simplicity apparent. As an example, you can see the difference by writing any number using numerals and the written word in English. The number 2,932 is shown in four easy digits when using numerals, but when using the alphabet, it becomes ‘two thousand nine hundred and thirty-two,’ taking up far more space.

The tax records contained hundreds of numbers like that, and even if the time taken to read out a single number wasn’t significant, that amount of time increased exponentially when applied to the thousands of numbers involved. Both reading and writing those numbers would be far more efficient if they could introduce Zenjirou’s numerals. There was also a possibility that her husband was right about it creating a class that, while illiterate, could at least perform math.

Of course, Aura couldn’t say whether the creation of such a stratum of citizens would be an advantage or disadvantage to the royal family and the country.

“I see,” Fabio answered after a brief amount of thought. “I agree with the

benefits, but I oppose suddenly introducing them to the public. It would invite chaos. However simple they may be to learn, gaining such knowledge from the fundamentals is still a big thing to ask. If you make learning them compulsory, you will face at least some degree of resistance."

"Hm, I see. I suppose so..." she replied, resting her chin in her hand and thinking. "In which case, we could distribute instructions on how to use them and have any documents that we compose hereafter use both systems. Then we can see how they are received, perhaps?"

"That will still require making them compulsory for those working for the royal family in administrative capacities," Fabio pointed out calmly.

"Is it unworkable?"

After another moment of thought, her aide shook his head. "No, that much should be doable. I shall make the arrangements at once."

"Indeed, please do," Aura nodded in satisfaction.

It was frustrating that she couldn't introduce the system all at once, but such extreme reforms often failed if they were rushed. In the worst case, it would be better to include numerals as part of standard training from that point onwards, allowing for a new generation of workers who could use them.

But it would be best not to expect visible improvements from the introduction of a new system just yet. If she wanted immediate results then she could demonstrate with the records she had borrowed from Zenjirou.

"It would seem that Margrave Velvidace, Baron Colunga, Lord Knight Tabino, and Lord Knight Gamez all have inexcusable discrepancies within their records," she observed, her tongue running over her lips as they split into an almost predatory grin.

"Your Majesty," Fabio countered calmly, "even if that is the case, a precedent has been set of overlooking it. A sudden ramping up of pressure could cause outbursts."

"I know. I am not so foolish as to suddenly bring them up on charges. I merely intend to use this to indicate our awareness and gain concessions," she declared, her nostrils flaring.

Humans were amusing. They would delude themselves into believing that their actions were completely legitimate if left unpunished for decades, despite the clearly defined illegality of those actions. Such people would resent you if you were to suddenly bring the law to bear on them, arguing that since you had done nothing for so long, it made no sense to start now.

It was an emotional perspective, but even a monarch could suffer a harsh backlash if they didn't tread carefully. The ruler and royal family may have had overwhelming power within the kingdom, but not so much that they could risk ignoring collusion between noble families.

"Additionally, the names you mentioned were a large part of why our country emerged victorious from the war."

"Indeed, I cannot deny the value of their services," she admitted.

The majority of the remaining nobles were survivors of the war. They were unlikely to be heavily taxing their populations and simply lining their own pockets. Most incompetents who would do so had been unable to maintain their family standings through the war and had mostly fallen into ruin. That was why those who remained were a nuisance.

The names that Aura had mentioned were funneling their misrepresented taxes into their regional armies. The resulting manpower had been indispensable during the war, so she couldn't say the unpaid taxes weren't being spent for the benefit of the country.

Still, if those dues were paid legitimately then it would strengthen the royal army. The royal family pledged that national taxes would go to strengthen the kingdom's military. But the royal army was not flexible enough to protect each individual territory, so the regional lords could not ignore a chance to strengthen their own local troops.

Neither approach was incorrect, so it was inevitable that it would someday cause friction between the royalty and nobility. It was clear that tacitly allowing these tax issues, and therefore the strengthening of regional armies, to continue would eventually create an imbalance of power within the country.

At worst, it could lead to an alliance between the feudal lords and ultimately rebellion against the royal family, and Aura wanted to maintain the ability of

the royal army to put down such potential uprisings. At present, there was no one who would see such conflicts as anything but futile, but there was no guarantee of their successors, or even later generations, all sharing that level of intelligence.

"The law is still the law," she declared. "I will make allowances so that their honor and good names are not impinged upon, but there must be a reckoning."

Fabio fell into a brief silence. "In that case, what do you think of directly informing them that irregularities have been discovered and requesting their voluntary cooperation to avoid such concerns in future?" he finally suggested.

"That seems to be an appropriate response. Very well, I shall leave the details to you."

"As you wish, Your Majesty."

That topic dealt with for the time being, Aura brought up another. "Oh, yes, what of the tutor for my husband? I presume the majority of candidates have been gathered?"

"Indeed," her aide answered, not missing a beat at the sudden shift in topic. "There were three self-recommendations and thirty-one nominations. Most of them are young, unmarried women with large amounts of magic."

Aura let out a scornful laugh at the blatant attempts of those aiming for concubine status. "Good grief, do they take me for a fool? Either they are simply incompetent, not recognizing my aim at all, or merely annoying if they *have* understood but are still working towards their own goals."

The nobles were ignoring their ruler's desires and sending in people to become Zenjirou's concubine. Despite the worthy cause of maintaining the royal and noble bloodlines, it was clearly inviting conflict with the queen to some extent.

"I think that rather than taking you for a fool, the prospect of becoming Sir Zenjirou's concubine is a greater incentive than your anger is a deterrent."

She snorted unhappily at that. "I doubt he is so careless as to be manipulated by someone pulling a concubine's strings."

“I quite agree, although our personal knowledge of him is what enables us to say that.”

“Likely so, yes. Well, I suppose we shall have to contact Lady Pasquala and request her assistance,” she replied, stretching in her seat to work out the kinks in her muscles.

Fabio opened his mouth, rather more hesitantly than he usually would. “Pardon, but there is at least one suggestion we cannot ignore. Count Márquez has nominated his wife, Lady Octavia. You may well be aware that she is considered a model noblewoman. Her intelligence, decorum, and skill with magic are beyond reproach. Furthermore, with her already being married, it theoretically suits your own intentions.”

“That swine!” Aura choked out at the unexpected name.

Octavia was a married woman, well educated, comported herself well, and excelled at magic. With those factors taken into account, she did indeed fulfill Aura’s requirements. That was, of course, if you ignored the fact that, despite being married to Count Márquez, she was his second wife and still in her early twenties. Along with her beauty and tendency to defer to men, she had been a darling of the court until she had married a few years ago. Raffaello Márquez, Aura’s former marriage candidate, was actually older than his stepmother.

“Does he intend to send his own wife into an affair?” she asked, aghast.

“No. This is only my personal opinion, but I don’t believe that to be the case when we consider Count Márquez’s personality. As I am sure you are aware, Lady Octavia is perhaps the ideal noblewoman by our country’s standards. She naturally supports men and makes them feel important, and is skilled at giving them confidence. With such a woman having prolonged close contact with Sir Zenjirou, I believe the count may be aiming to inspire some assertiveness within him, to create a fissure in your relationship.”

Most men would become full of themselves if they were constantly flattered, praised, and looked upon respectfully, and would eventually decide that they could make their own decisions. By guiding Zenjirou’s thoughts in that direction, the Márquez family hoped to instill an interest in politics in him, making him an ideal patsy; a direct line to royal authority. To put it more crudely, the count’s

goal, by Fabio's reckoning, was to "pull Zenjirou out from under the queen."

If that were the case, then the issue was that, aside from Count Márquez's black heart, Octavia herself was not at all malicious, and it would be *she* who bore the brunt of the consequences. If Aura's estimation of the woman's character was correct, she would have no ulterior motive of her own and would simply do her utmost to act as Zenjirou's tutor. Ostensibly, she was indeed the ideal choice.

"What are your thoughts, Your Majesty? We can concoct some reason to refuse her."

Somewhat displeased by her secretary's expression, Aura shook her head.

"No, there is no benefit to inviting the count's displeasure like that. Whatever else, he will have to show himself eventually. I can hardly continue refusing each and every thing requested of me when it comes to Sir Zenjirou. Count Márquez at her back or not, if there are no issues with Lady Octavia herself then it may even be advantageous for my husband to have her as his instructor. Accept her."

"At once, Your Majesty. I shall begin the preparations immediately," Fabio responded with a courteous bow.

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There was a slight feeling of tension pervading the inner palace. It was the first time since Zenjirou's arrival that an outsider would set foot within, as it had thus far been occupied exclusively by Zenjirou, Aura, and their attendants.

Zenjirou sank into a sofa as he took yet another deep breath. *A tutor, huh? I never thought I'd be taking up studying again at this age. Although, I guess I used to have training here and there for work, which is similar.*

He had a fair amount of external experience as well, and while he wasn't unused to meeting new people, this would be the first time he would be the "superior" in the relationship.

They had decided the appliances he had brought would be too alluring for outsiders, so he was waiting in an ordinary room of the inner palace. The heat in there, without the blessing of the makeshift cooler, had him sweating

constantly, and he was rehydrating by drinking water with the appropriate amounts of sugar and salt mixed in.

Need to remember, can't be too respectful, and I shouldn't give my name until they give theirs. Also can't be too rude or overbearing... this is extremely tricky.

"Excuse me," came a voice as he was going over the fundamentals Aura had drilled into him, "Lady Octavia has arrived. May I show her in?"

"Do so," Zenjirou replied after clearing his throat, speaking in a commanding tone for once.

His habits from his years of employment in Japan had him automatically rising from his seat to greet his guest at the door, but he realized his mistake as he stood and waited next to the sofa instead.

The door opened with a clatter and a woman entered the room.

"It is my pleasure to meet you, Sir Zenjirou. I am Octavia, the wife of Count Manuel Márquez, the lord of the Márquez county of Capua. I have been entrusted with the role of tutor on this occasion, and it is my honor to carry out that duty. Despite my shortcomings and feeble skills, I shall do my utmost to aid you," she said in a soft tone before bowing deeply.

Huh, "shortcomings" and "feeble skills"? I guess humility is considered a virtue here too, he thought to himself.

Zenjirou had read about countries even on Earth where such "humility" wouldn't be communicated and, with those thoughts in mind, gave an order in as dignified a voice as he could manage.

"Raise your head."

"At once," Octavia, raising her head as smoothly as she had lowered it.



Right, so this is what the kingdom considers "a model woman." I can certainly see why.

The words that came to Zenjirou's mind upon meeting her were "slender," "pure," and "chaste." She wasn't overly tall and was of average height from his perspective, maybe 160 cm or so. She had narrow, gently sloping shoulders which lent her a slighter appearance than her height would imply. She had glossy, straight black hair and dark, jet-black eyes the likes of which you rarely saw in Japanese people. In contrast to her hair and eye color, she had very pale skin for someone from the southern countries, a light brown tone that was closer to the color of cream.

Her nose was prominent, but most of her other features were smooth, close to what you would expect of a tanned Japanese person. Although nowadays, if you wanted to see such a beauty, you would generally need to visit a modeling or acting agency.

"I am Zenjirou, Queen Aura's husband. I do not know how long our acquaintance will be, but I would like for it to be a fruitful one."

"Likewise, my thanks for your courtesy to one such as myself," Octavia answered, bowing her head again at his efforts.

Conversing without humbling himself was actually wearing on his mind more than he had expected.

"Then let's hear your thoughts first. Sit," he offered, spurred away from his plan by the fatigue of holding such a conversation.

"Ah? Certainly, excuse me," she replied, surprised by his words for a moment before remembering why she was there, and sat down on the sofa. With the table between them, Octavia explained how and what she would be teaching him about manners, etiquette, and magic.

"So, you'll essentially be teaching me history and magic, and if I start acting outside of what etiquette dictates then you'll point it out?" he asked, putting together what she'd said and summarizing it.

He received a gentle smile in response. "Indeed. Just hearing about manners does not mean that you will retain them. You seem to have a good grasp on the

basic framework, so I believe it to be a good plan."

"And I will be taking lunch with you from now on?"

"You will. Eating with someone will enable you to focus on and practice the etiquette you learn. I feel this is the optimal way for you to master these things."

It made sense, as manners weren't something that became ingrained just by hearing about them. He would try, make mistakes, have those mistakes pointed out, correct them, and refine his behaviors. It would take time but was likely the best way.

Yet thinking of how he would be spending his lunches, watched over by his teacher, made him feel uneasy. At the very least, it wouldn't be an enjoyable time that made his heart soar like the days he spent with Aura. But Zenjirou wasn't prideful enough to refuse a good opportunity to learn for such selfish reasons.

"Very well, if you believe that to be the optimum choice then I have no objections. Continue as you've planned."

Octavia gave another soft smile at that and bowed once more. "My thanks. Then we will begin at once. When I arrived, you rose from the sofa to greet me, correct?"

"Oh?!" Zenjirou couldn't help but exclaim at her immediate quibble.

Octavia continued carefully, making certain that her tone betrayed no hint of censure. "I am exceedingly grateful that you would be so polite to one such as me, but actions like that carry the risk of others taking you lightly. As a rule, the only person you should stand to greet is Queen Aura. Other than foreign royals, monarchs, and the first in line to the throne, there is no need for you to be so polite.

"Also, you bade me sit while you still stood. This is a needless courtesy as well. Your behavior and demeanor will change based on who you are faced with, so I would never dream of dictating such things, but a royal should appear more settled."

"Got it, I'll take more care," he replied with a nod. He managed to smooth

over his expression but would have liked to cover his face and fall to the floor.

Damn... I was trying to be careful, but I guess my habits from work are showing up.

When he was at work, he'd never have presumed to sit down before a client, and apparently, such habits were harder to break than he'd imagined.

Octavia seemed to be looking through him as she smiled consolingly, and moved on to the next topic with a calm voice. "Now, today I wish to start by explaining the basics of magic. Should there be anything you find unclear, or any questions that you have, do not hesitate to ask. I shall answer your queries to the best of my ability."

"Right, please do."

"Sir, that request..."

"R-right. Um, then... you may speak, begin your explanation," Zenjirou corrected himself, clearing his throat to distract from his immediate mistake.

His response seemed to be correct this time as Octavia gave a small nod and continued in her pleasant voice, explaining things thoroughly. "I shall begin with the fundamentals. Magic is divided into two main categories. The first is magic that essentially anyone can use, elemental magic. The other is lineal magic, which only people from certain bloodlines can use."

"Do you mean earth, water, fire, and air by 'elemental,' and things like space-time magic by 'lineal'?" Zenjirou interjected, but Octavia showed no displeasure at the interruption and simply smiled.

"I do indeed. However, ignoring the fact that lineal magic can only be used by those of a certain bloodline, the basics are not fundamentally different from elemental magic. There are three conditions necessary for a successful invocation. The correct pronunciation, the correct understanding, and the correct amount of mana."

"Pronunciation, understanding, and mana?" he asked. From what little he'd heard so far, it seemed like the kind of magic you'd find in games and books, but it was nothing tangible.

Fortunately, his beautiful teacher seemed to intuit his lack of understanding and began to explain things more deeply. “First is the language you use while casting magic. It is a language that is simply called the Arcane Tongue, but without this language, you cannot use magic. Please observe.”

She raised her index finger into the air and chanted, *“O unseen water scattered throughout the sky, gather at my fingertip and form a sphere. As compensation, I present eighteen offerings of mana to the spirits of water.”*

As soon as Zenjirou heard those words, a round droplet of water formed on her finger.

“Agh?!” he gasped, not even having time to be surprised by what was happening as he gripped his head. *What was that?! She only opened her mouth for a moment but it sounded stupidly long?*

He could swear that his instructor hadn’t actually been speaking for long enough to utter so many words.

Octavia placed the water into her now-empty teacup and bowed deeply to a bewildered Zenjirou. “My deepest apologies for my imprudence. The Arcane Tongue changes in meaning with the slightest alteration in pronunciation, stress, or how each syllable is punctuated. Commensurately, you can convey an extraordinary amount of meaning in a short sound. This means that the first time you hear such a large amount of information in such a small amount of sound, it can be uncomfortable. I erred, and can only once more offer my apologies,” she said with a bow of her head that was so deep it exposed the back of her neck.

Zenjirou shook his head lightly. “If that’s true, I wouldn’t have been able to avoid it when I learned magic either way. It was indeed a mistake not to warn me first, but your apology is sufficient. Continue.”

She nodded gratefully at his forbearance and did so. “My thanks for your leniency. I shall take care that such an omission does not take place in the future.”

“Very well,” he allowed placidly, taken aback by the grandiose apology but trying to keep those feelings off his face.

It had definitely been careless on her part, but she'd been under the assumption that most people would be somewhat used to the phenomenon, and could not have predicted that the sensation would be new to Zenjirou.

The existence of the soul of language was a given in this world, so there would be few who were discomfited by a difference in the amount of sound they heard and the amount of information actually being conveyed. The number of people for whom it would feel like a blow to the head was even less. So from that perspective, you could say that both of them had simply been unlucky with that first demonstration.

"I shall continue. Just then, I used the correct pronunciation and correct understanding with the correct amount of mana to cast magic that created a ball of water. I shall now purposely make a mistake with each of those three things."

She once more raised her right index finger and chanted, *"Uhl magoh."*

It was an unintelligible, short sound that reached Zenjirou's ears, but nothing happened.

"I simply pronounced the words slightly wrong, and that small change was enough to render them meaningless, and the spell did not function. Now, I shall pronounce it correctly but use an incorrect understanding."

Once more, she raised her finger and briefly opened her mouth.

"O unseen water scattered throughout the sky, gather at my fingertip and form a sphere. As compensation, I present eighteen offerings of mana to the spirits of water."

This time, as with the first, the full meaning echoed in his ears, but no water appeared on her finger.

"On that occasion, I said it correctly but imagined the results of a different spell, leading to what you just saw. Finally, I shall complete the chanting and understanding steps correctly, but offer the wrong amount of mana."

"O unseen water scattered throughout the sky, gather at my fingertip and form a sphere. As compensation, I present eighteen offerings of mana to the spirits of water."

Zenjirou heard the chant for the fourth time, and the meaning was once again clear to him, but there was no effect.

With a small smile on her face, Octavia looked at him and explained. “While I said that I would present eighteen offerings of mana, I instead provided twenty, and the spell failed as a result.”

Zenjirou had listened in understanding up to that point, but the surprise of her last statement made him speak up. “Wait a minute, you’re not allowed to provide too much mana either?”

He forgot to moderate his tone and Octavia nodded. “Correct, whether you offer too much or too little, the magic will not work. A slight difference in a large amount of mana may be overlooked, but delicate magic is strict with the amount of mana used. That is why spellcasters with large mana pools often have difficulty with delicate magic like this. Of course, there are exceptions, like Royal Magister Espiridion.”

The explanation made sense, since you wouldn’t even need to think if you were asked whether it was easier to fill a cup to the rim with a 200 ml bottle or a 10 L water can.

The rational part of his mind comprehended her explanation while the rest of him let the words flow over him. He was rather excited about being able to use magic himself someday. But people with large amounts of mana like him struggled with delicate spells, so would he ever really have the opportunity to use it, considering he would not often be leaving the inner palace?

“So, does that mean people with lots of mana are unsuited to learning general magic?” he inquired.

“Yes, I have heard that Her Majesty cannot use magic outside of space-time and wide-area annihilation fire magic. Of course, such spells do not only require large stores of mana, but also exceedingly long incantations, so it can take several months to learn the correct pronunciations.”

The more he heard, the further away the day he could make use of it seemed. “Then, frankly speaking, if I started learning magic today, how long would it take for me to be able to cast anything?” he asked, having at some point forgotten that the main goals of their lessons were manners and etiquette.

Octavia could well understand what he was asking and, in accordance with her role as an instructor, could not lie, simply shrinking in on herself slightly as she answered. “Well... to accurately judge the amount of mana you use, you first need to be cognizant of your own reserves and able to manipulate them at will. Normally, the former takes two years, and the latter an additional year, I would estimate.”

“Three years...” he groaned.

Octavia hurriedly moved to reassure him. “Ah, but at that point, the rest is relatively simple. You just need to memorize the correct incantation and mentally envision a clear image of the result, then provide the correct amount of mana. You should be able to learn a simple spell within a day.”

She suddenly seemed to remember she had just told him that people with a surfeit of mana like him were ill-suited to simple spells, and looked up apologetically. Her expression calmed him down. If he thought about it, he didn’t *need* to learn magic, it was just better that a member of the royal family with so much mana learned to use it. Whether it took three or five years to do so didn’t matter.

Either way, guess it won’t be useful in my day-to-day life.

At present, Zenjirou was ignorant of the possibilities provided by the magic dwelling within his veins, so he easily discarded them. “Got it, then I’ll take it slow. Guide me well, Octavia.”

“I shall; please leave it to me,” she said sincerely, smiling gently at the queen’s spouse as he quickly recentered himself.

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Later that day, Octavia’s first lesson had finished without incident. Now released from the strain of the last several hours, Zenjirou was lounging in another room with his wife. Having just left the bath, he had his customary can of low-malt beer in hand, and Aura was holding a glass of brandy in front of her face, savoring the mellow fragrance.

Several days had seen her finish the bottle of white wine, and the next thing she’d chosen was the boxed brandy. This world didn’t really have a concept of

distilled spirits, so she had choked on her first sip due to its strength. Once she had grown accustomed to it, however, she much preferred the taste.

She drank it straight, just like Zenjirou's vague memories said it should be consumed. The tendency to drink it at room temperature, which he had also informed her of, was ill-fitting for the heat in the Kingdom of Capua, though, so she preferred to cool it in the fridge first.

She slowly let the drink pass down her throat as she enjoyed its rich amber color under the lamps.

"Hey, is it really that tasty?" Zenjirou asked.

"Indeed, it has a surprisingly exquisite scent," she answered with a nod, "and a rich flavor. I am quite enamored with it now that I am used to the drink."

"Oh, does it now?"

Truthfully, Zenjirou didn't really know the difference between brandy and whiskey, so he couldn't parse her impressions of it. The drink was called Hennessy XO, and a single bottle cost over 10,000 yen.

Well, connoisseurs knew their drinks. Zenjirou, very much not a connoisseur, was quite happy with his chilled beer.

Having drained her glass, Aura placed it on the table and turned to her husband. "So, how was it? I would like to hear your opinions."

Zenjirou was somewhat surprised by the sudden change in subject but shifted the can away from his mouth and answered honestly. "Ah, right. If I had to sum it up, I'd call it more tiring than I was prepared for. I was focusing on everything, trying so hard not to offend, and I honestly barely remember eating at lunch."

"I've caused you a great deal of bother."

"It's fine. I need to learn it, right? Besides, the lecture on magic was interesting. Even if it did put me out a bit when I heard it'd take more than three years before I can use any myself," he said, waving his free hand at Aura.

He had actually been very excited about seeing magic firsthand. Going from his original world to this one had been a display of magic, of course, but he was the focus of the spells, so hadn't seen any of it actually happen. In contrast, the

magic that Octavia had shown him, with an orb of water floating atop her finger, was much more clearly *magic*. In terms of persuasion, it was far, far more convincing.

“Well, there are no shortcuts. If you wish to learn it, you must put in an earnest effort. But it is something that anyone can learn if they simply dedicate the time. If you have the commitment to follow through, I am certain your efforts will not be wasted,” she encouraged, burying her husband’s arm within her chest to console him.

“Aura...” he murmured. He lowered his guard at the soft sensations, and the queen smiled slightly meanly as she whispered into his ear.

“So, what did you think of Lady Octavia? Was she easy on your eyes?”

Hearing another woman’s name from his wife’s lips made him flinch reflexively, being a man, despite his lack of guilt.

“Hmm, so, how was she?” the queen pressed, holding him tightly so that he couldn’t escape.

Zenjirou’s gaze sought the ceiling as he answered. “Well, yeah, she definitely was beautiful, and really nice. Yup, I can see why her type is so popular in the country.”

“Oh?” Her musing words seemed to be at a lower pitch than usual. “So you mean she was attractive to you as well?”

Aura wasn’t unconfident, but she was aware that she was the opposite of Octavia, and her tone had turned searching.

Zenjirou wasn’t so dense that he missed his wife’s worsening mood. “Nah, she’s in my strike zone, yeah, but kinda borderline. Like she’d have trouble hitting a four-seamer if she missed her swing.”

Unfortunately, his flustered justification was impossible to understand for someone of this world. It was just a barrage of incomprehensible words to Aura. Even so, his tone and overall impression let her know what he was trying to say.

A grin on her lips, she asked again, wanting it put more bluntly. “And what does that mean? Word it a little more clearly.”

His instinctive reaction was to declare, “As if I can.” He wasn’t able to ignore his embarrassment enough to say something like, ‘You’re the only one I love,’ or ‘You’re far prettier.’

“Hm? Well, clearly, right?” he said, still focusing on the ceiling and not looking at his wife as she rocked against him in enjoyment, finding a compromise between his embarrassment and her desires. “Umm, well... you know. If it was Octavia who had summoned me rather than you, I wouldn’t be here right now.”

As he spoke, he could feel his cheeks reddening. Would she be satisfied with that? He hoped so, because if she wanted him to be even more direct, he might just die of shame. His face still pointing skyward, he glanced over at her. Her red hair was swaying in the corner of his eye.

“Ahaha... ahaha, I see, I see,” she murmured happily. Apparently, it had indeed been enough to move her heart. “I too,” she continued, “am fortunate beyond words that it was you I summoned.”

Her piece said, she pressed a passionate kiss to his cheek.

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Having fallen asleep in bed with her husband, Aura opened her eyes in the dead of night and carefully got up, ensuring that she didn’t wake Zenjirou.

The bedroom had lights, but she couldn’t use them while he was sleeping. She felt around in the pitch-black room and her hands found a soft piece of cloth. She picked up the thin, smooth clothing—the negligee that Zenjirou had brought—and a smile made its way onto her face.

She had worn that lascivious dress before they’d retired for the night, in gratitude for Zenjirou’s earlier answer, and his reaction had been so entertaining she had wanted to immortalize it with that “digicam” of his.

She hadn’t been able to restrain her laugh as he let out what was practically a yelp rather than any actual words. He hadn’t thought that she would be unaware of the sexy nightwear (having examined all of his luggage when he’d arrived), but her wearing it of her own volition was a rather effective surprise attack.

It was a somewhat bizarre situation when the one who was fighting against a

tide of crimson upon their face along with the accompanying shame was Zenjirou, despite it being Aura who was wearing the embarrassing clothing. Regardless, Zenjirou had certainly been provoked by the sight of his wife in the bewitching negligee, and their night together had been slightly more intense than usual, and had lasted longer as well.

Remembering the evening's activities made her pause as her face relaxed. She set the sheer lingerie aside and searched for the house dress she had been wearing before.

A short time later, she had found it and carried it, still nude, away from the bed. She picked her way across the room, slowly, carefully, quietly, all to ensure that Zenjirou didn't wake. Finally reaching the door, she succeeded in leaving the bedchamber without her husband noticing.

Once she stood within the living room, she switched a single lamp on and quickly dressed in its illumination. Now clad in a blue, sleeveless gown, Aura seated herself on a leather-covered sofa and rang a bell on the table.

A few moments later, a young maid entered. She had relied upon the candle in her hand for illumination in the dark corridors, and she squinted slightly in the much brighter light from the lamp.

A striking woman with long, blonde hair—a rarity in the kingdom—she had originally been Aura's attendant but now worked closest to Zenjirou.

"Excuse me, Your Majesty."

Aura spared a glance at the woman as she bowed respectfully. "I would hear your report."

In accordance with her liege's words, the maid began to speak of what she had witnessed that day, doing her utmost to remain objective. "At once. From what I observed, Lady Octavia made no suspicious advances and appeared to be faithfully carrying out her role as Sir Zenjirou's tutor," she reported. She had entered the study session on several occasions during their session, bringing water, towels, and the like.

"Hmm, I see. Then perhaps she truly is being used for reconnaissance?" Aura mused.

Octavia had always been a straightforward woman, unsuited to scheming. Count Márquez may also have simply wanted his wife's impression of the kind of person "the queen's husband" was. It was something to remain wary of, but she most likely wouldn't need to be quite so focused on it.

"Understood. Hereafter, only report if Lady Octavia does something suspicious."

"By your will, milady," the maid bowed.

Aura gave a noise of satisfaction before continuing. "Now, how has my husband spent his days? Has he become involved with anyone?"

This was a question she had asked the servants several times. Historically, the kings who didn't turn their attentions to the maids of the inner palace were in the minority. And unlike those kings, Zenjirou was living here full time rather than merely visiting. It was almost *less* natural for him to not ogle the servants. Yet still, once more, the maid shook her head and offered the same answer as always.

"No, there has been no one Sir Zenjirou has laid a hand upon, nor even looked at in that way. Actually, he seems to dislike us even entering his room, so we avoid going in without a direct order. He also moves to another room when we come in to clean."

The lord of the palace moving from one room to another because the maids were cleaning sounded absurd, but it was another part of his life in Japan that Zenjirou simply couldn't shake. It was almost like a man being chased out by his wife's vacuuming.

Aura nodded at the report and gave her instructions. "I see. I am repeating myself, but my husband is someone who finds it difficult to ask for things or demand that something be done. He even seems to regard such behavior as a 'vice.' It may be difficult to serve such a person, but I ask that you act to preempt his desires and fulfill his wishes."

"We shall, ma'am."

"Very well, you may go. Good work."

"I will take my leave then, ma'am," the maid said with a bow before

departing, her report successfully delivered.

The door closed behind her with a clunk, and Aura let out a breath. “I am parched... perhaps a glass of water,” she said, suddenly aware of her thirst.

She took a metal pitcher from the fridge and poured it into a glass, then quaffed the drink and muttered to herself in the dimly lit room. “So... Zenjirou has no eyes for either Lady Octavia or the maids...”

She had wrapped her arms around her body at some point. The same body that Zenjirou had made love to that very night, as he had on many others. Even now, the sensation of his fingers and lips over her body remained, so she knew just how passionately he could seek a woman.

Yet despite that, the man had no eyes for anyone but her.

She broke out into a chuckle. How could she describe these feelings? She had never expected the love of a man to be so pleasant. It was a warmth within her, different from the sense of fulfillment that she gained from governance, and different from the gentle heat of a serving of wine to commemorate a military victory.

Putting it less pleasantly, it was a type of superiority. The joy of a single man seeing her charm as a woman, and the ecstasy of him seeing her as the greatest woman.

“Curses, I rather wish to monopolize him now,” she murmured.

If she lost herself in these thoughts, she might react reflexively when it came time for Zenjirou to take a concubine. She couldn’t hide her rampaging emotions, though. The most unexpected part of it was that those feelings were immensely pleasant to her.

“Well, regardless. There is no need to worry about future possibilities just yet,” she said, shaking her head and extinguishing the light before feeling her way back to the other room.

Once she reached her bed, she stripped off the dress and slid her sensuous skin onto the mattress where Zenjirou still lay. She chuckled again, embracing him and pressing her bare breasts into his back.

“Mmh...”

He didn’t have a particularly broad back for a man, but it was strangely comforting to her, holding him like this. It felt like she was where she belonged. And indeed, pressing herself to his back like this, it didn’t take her long to fall into a peaceful sleep.

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Several days had passed since Zenjirou had first started learning from Octavia. He had just seen his beloved wife off to work and was using his computer to make the most of his time alone before Octavia arrived.

He was currently playing back a video that he’d made with Aura, something to help him learn culture and etiquette. Of course, the issue of the sound recorded by the camera not being subject to the soul of language was still there, but a little thought bore a simple solution.

Zenjirou would just have to parrot Aura’s explanation in Japanese.

“Cuando te invitan a un baile, la persona con la que bailas la primera y la última canción...”

“Um, when you are invited to a dance, the person you dance with for the first and last songs...”

Following the unfamiliar sounds of the native language from Aura, he heard himself speaking in Japanese. He didn’t particularly enjoy listening to his own voice, but he couldn’t deny the utility of the process. He just needed to ignore his discomfort.

As he worked, there came a knock at the door.

“Excuse me, sir, but Lady Octavia has arrived.”

“Ah, okay, I’ll be right there,” he said, turning off the computer and standing up.

His computer, watch, and phone all had accurate clocks on them, but he was the only one who knew the time to the minute, so there was no point in worrying about the exact hour.

“Right, let’s go,” he said to himself.

He opened the door and stepped out into the corridor. Beyond was a familiar blonde maid, bowing. He had been at a loss over how to interact with the servants at first, but by now had more or less gotten used to their behavior.

“Good work. If you’d clean the rooms now...”

“Right away, sir.”

Per his preference, they stayed out of his room as much as possible, and he treated them like hotel staff, keeping an appropriate distance.

His attitude might have been a bit relaxed for the lord of the palace, but this was supposed to be his home, and putting on airs would wear on him mentally. Fortunately, the attendants had been carefully selected by Aura and could be trusted not to let anything slip, so slight flaws in his behavior weren’t a problem.

I finished the review from yesterday. Man, I want to finish the etiquette stuff this morning, then I can use everything afterwards for a lecture on magic. Right, lunch is more than three hours, so if I can meet up with Aura, I should prepare for the magic studies, that way I should be able to progress further in the afternoon...

Zenjirou walked down the corridor as he planned out the most efficient use of his day. If he used his spare time for review, he could learn faster, and then preparing for his afternoon lessons on magic would be even more effective.

Seeing industriousness as a virtue, a perspective fostered over the past twenty-four years, wasn’t something that was easily reversed. He seemed to have forgotten that he had come here to get away from needing to worry about “making the most of his time.”

While Zenjirou received his lessons, the maids would clean the living room and bedrooms. Attendants dedicated to the inner palace, they had the skill not to bring shame to their positions, but cleaning those rooms was a little different from the norm.

“You know the rules, correct? Simply wipe Sir Zenjirou’s things; absolutely do not use water.”

“Yes, ma’am!” the other maids answered the refined middle-aged woman who was in charge of cleaning.

It would have been difficult to teach them all how to deal with the electronics, so Zenjirou had just told them that dusting would be enough, and not to use water to clean things. Even amongst his appliances, there were only a few that could be damaged by water, but it would be easier to deal with it all himself than to point out each off-limit item to the maids.

The older woman kept an eye on the others as they cleaned, doing her own work at the same time. She fixed a glare on a group that had all the appearance of working busily and called out to them.

“You three! How many of you does it take to clean a table?! ‘One’ is the answer. Hurry up and finish there!”

The three in front of the table with Zenjirou’s computer flinched at her reprimand, ducking their heads. Zenjirou had been sitting there just before, which meant the fan was still spinning with a partially melted lump of ice in front of it. There was already another batch of water currently in a metal tin in the freezer, which would have solidified by the time Zenjirou returned. So he had given permission for the maids to do as they wished with the partly-used hunk of ice on the desk.

He had also told them they could use the chilled towels in the fridge as long as it was in moderation. Having the maids who were working in his room wiping off their own sweat kept things more hygienic for him and Aura.

“His permission to use the remnants of ice only holds true once we are finished. Using your lord’s tools to cool down while shirking your responsibilities is inappropriate,” she said, mercilessly opening the window shutters and allowing a hot blast of air to fill the room.

“Gah?!”

“No, just a bit more!”

“Nooo, my ice, it’s mellllting...”

The three maids who had been feigning work and savoring the cooling breeze despaired exaggeratedly. The temperature was relatively restrained in the

mornings, but it was still already over 30 degrees.

The middle-aged woman faced the three and put her hands upon her hips as she remonstrated with them. “Cease your prattling. We shan’t be able to see what is dirty without the sunlight. Turn the lights off; I’m sure you know how?”

“We dooo.”

“Then I shall clean the floor over there.”

“Agh, my ice! My precious ice...”

Once she had seen the three problem children return to work, the older woman let out a sigh. “Honestly, those three, I can’t take my eyes off them for an instant.”

When they had first been appointed to the inner palace, the girls had been nervous and stiff, doing their utmost not to invite their otherworldly lord’s displeasure. But when it came down to it, he was so easygoing that it was almost anticlimactic. He wasn’t selfish and would laugh off most mistakes. He also rarely called upon them, so the young maids had seemingly lost their sense of professionalism in less than a month.

The three in question were the most lax of the group, but all of the younger attendants were a similar source of concern at this point.

“How unfortunate, to think that these are the girls honored with serving the inner palace,” she grumbled as she wiped the sofa down with practiced movements.

Once they were done with the living room, the bedroom was next.

“Ugh...”

“Yet again...”

“Ahahaha, her Majesty and Sir Zenjirou sure get along well.”

The trio had strained smiles upon their faces at the usual scent wafting from the bed. The sheets, along with the nightwear and underwear in the basket next to the bed, when coupled with the smell, told the story of just how well their queen and prince consort had gotten along the night before.

“It’s wonderful. At this rate, we may be able to expect an heir rather soon,” said the older woman with a satisfied nod.

Of course, as citizens of the country, they were happy to know their queen and her husband had a good relationship, but it was a somewhat complicated feeling for young women who took pride in their looks. They were currently wearing maid uniforms, which covered rather less of the body than the style’s roots in the northern continent would suggest. The bright blue skirts barely reached their knees, and their arms were completely uncovered. The outfits weren’t cut to emphasize the bust or waist, but the uniform should still have been rather charming on a young maid.

Yet despite that, their lord had yet to lay even a finger on them. If he was simply unconcerned with women, that would be one thing, but the proof of his relationship with their queen was always visible in the bedroom. It wasn’t that they necessarily wanted to “serve” him in that way, but the utter lack of interest hurt their womanly pride a bit.

“Come on, we don’t have much time. Let’s finish this quickly. Change the sheets, wash the laundry, return the laundered clothes to the dresser.”

“Right.”

“Understood.”

“Hah, this room’s a little cooler...”

The bedroom was smaller than the living room, so even with washing and changing the sheets, it wouldn’t take half the time to finish.

With familiar movements, they got to work fulfilling their duties.

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That afternoon, Zenjirou had finished his etiquette lesson with Octavia and was relaxing in the freshly-cleaned living room.

It was still daytime, so the drinks in the glasses that he and Aura held were not alcoholic, but rather water and fruit juice with ice floating in them.

They were resting, Aura tired from government affairs and Zenjirou weary from his lessons, sitting side by side and watching the TV. The voices were of

course in Japanese, and without the soul of language working on them, Aura was unable to understand, but the dialogue didn't matter much for what the two were watching.

After staring at the screen in silence for a while, the queen exclaimed, "Right, I have it!"

"No way, again? Don't tell me, don't you dare!" he cried out in surprise and agitation before turning back to the screen intensely.

The aim was to determine which part of the image was gradually changing within a time limit, and Aura was far better at it despite it being her first time and Zenjirou having brought it there. It must have been down to a basic difference in their skills of observation and attentiveness.

"Indeed, I shall not, no... The light pink flower in the bottom right certainly does draw the eye."

"Argh! Aura, no fair!"

The two of them had the kind of relaxed expressions on their faces that they could never show outside.

After a while, the TV and game were switched off, and Aura spoke to Zenjirou where he sat next to her, as she inclined her glass of iced water.

"So, how are things progressing? From our discussion last night, you should be quite proficient with your etiquette now."

He nodded in satisfaction at her question. "Yeah, apparently I'm proficient as of this morning or so. Well, at least enough that I shouldn't embarrass you."

"Oh, I am glad to hear it. So, you will strictly be learning magic this afternoon?" she asked with a smile, considering things mentally. *He is as diligent as ever. He may not realize it himself, but he always does his utmost to complete his responsibilities, when given them, to the best of his ability.*

She had subordinates like that, but they were surprisingly difficult to get the best use out of. They made every effort, so they were useful, but they wouldn't complain too much, so their superiors had to be careful to allocate their tasks

properly or they would work themselves into the ground.

Ignorant of her thoughts, Zenjirou gave a smile as he answered in turn. “Yeah, that’s right. So, could you tell me a bit about it now? The main bottleneck is the short-lived nature of the results, right? I heard the first things to overcome that were the Twin Kingdom’s enchantment magic and our space-time magic. Does that mean space-time magic does what the name implies and can affect time as well as space?”

Aura couldn’t hide an exasperated smile at his preparations for the afternoon lessons. “Come now, save the learning for later. You are with your wife now, not your tutor.”

His minimum qualifications for etiquette meant that he could finally appear publicly and at important events. He would soon be far busier, but if he kept up this pace, he wouldn’t last.

It would appear I was correct. She would have to keep an eye on him to ensure that he didn’t overwork himself.

“Ah, yeah, right. I am.”

With the sensation of his wife’s body against his right arm, his face relaxed as thoughts of what he wanted to ask before his lesson slipped from his mind.

Next to him, Aura rested her head on his shoulder and wrapped an arm around his back, pulling him closer. Their respective hints of warmth through the thin clothing were pleasant, and both husband and wife were lost for words, simply closing their eyes and luxuriating together in the comfortable embrace.

Eventually, the soft sounds of sleep rose from Zenjirou’s mouth.

“Mmm, so you fell asleep...” Aura murmured happily when she noticed, wrapping her arms around him and once more closing her own eyes.

No words broke the silence that fell over the room as the two made up for their lack of sleep the night before, the only sounds their deep breaths as they slept.

A few days remained before the queen’s husband would have to make his

debut, and he would spend the time peacefully.

To be continued in *The Ideal Sponger Life 2*.

Appendix — The Lord and Maids' Game Battle

There were maids with the dubious honor of the title "The Three Problem Maids" within the Capua Kingdom's inner palace. Of course, despite their moniker, they were still servants of the inner palace and had undergone a rigorous selection process.

Overall, there were no issues with their loyalty to the royal family, their skills, or their appearances. But compared to the other maids, they were a little more upfront with their desires, would get caught up in things, and would slack off when they pretended not to hear their superior's orders.

Amanda, the head maid, would frequently knit her brows disapprovingly, but they didn't make any mistakes that were severe enough to see them dismissed, and their lord, Zenjirou, didn't seem to mind, so their indiscretions were tacitly allowed. In a way, they may have been enjoying a stress-free life in the inner palace more than anyone else. They weren't fools, though, just a bit denser than the other maids, and a little bolder too.

That denseness and boldness had now gotten them into a situation that had the blood draining from their faces.

"Ahh?! What do I do?! I'm done for!" cried a slight, black-haired girl.

It had happened just as they'd returned to their room for a break from the intense midday heat. The maids were generally housed in three-person quarters, and this trio shared a room. They were often together while they worked as well. Essentially, the three were roommates and close colleagues.

"Whoa, what's wrong, Faye? Don't shout like that."

"What's up, Faye?"

The other two stared at her as, with sweat beading on the slight maid's brow, she pulled *it* from the pocket of her apron.

"What do I do?!" she wailed. "I accidentally... took this with me..."

The thing in her hands was a flat, black rectangle. Silence reigned in the small room. The first to break that silence was the taller of Faye's roommates.

"W-Wait, that's Sir Zenjirou's, isn't it? The thing he said not to get wet and to make sure not to drop. W-Why do you have it?"

It was only natural that they were panicking. Faye was holding a "handheld games console." It went without saying that it belonged to the prince consort and none of them were foolish enough to be ignorant of the severity of bringing it to their own room.

"What do I do, Dolores?" Faye asked, clinging to the taller woman as tears welled up in her eyes. She was usually the most easygoing of the three, but she couldn't hold back her tears.

Faye had excuses she could make if she were allowed to, though. Zenjirou's lessons with Lady Octavia would normally continue into the afternoon, but were to end two hours earlier during the hotter months, during which time he would return to the living room. It seemed Octavia had decided that he wouldn't be able to focus on the lecture in the excessive heat, but the maids weren't sure of the specifics.

At any rate, it meant that there were two hours less for Faye and the others to get the room clean each day. Their despair over that was expected, but they had put in their best effort and managed to finish before he returned.

She had only noticed the device once they were back in their own room and had time to breathe. She remembered *temporarily* picking up the black rectangle while she was cleaning the table, and putting it into her pocket for safekeeping, but had forgotten to place it back where it belonged afterwards.

However much she clung to the taller maid, her friend didn't have any idea how to fix the situation, either.

"If you ask me... Um, the only thing you can do is give it back before it gets serious," Dolores answered hesitantly, bewilderment and uncertainty dancing in her eyes, which were oddly narrow for a Capuan.

That was certainly logical. Faye had mistakenly taken one of her lord's possessions while cleaning. A normal lord would treat this as theft and level a

harsh punishment on the offender. But Dolores was right; the longer she left it, the worse it would be.

Faye tearfully shook her head in response. “I can’t. Sir Zenjirou and Her Majesty are eating in their room now. I can’t interrupt them.”

Recently, Zenjirou had been spending his lunches with Octavia for his etiquette lessons, and it had been a while since he had shared a meal with the queen. It was an activity that Zenjirou, who rarely gave actual *orders*, had told them to not interrupt unless there was an emergency.

Interrupting the royals to apologize might invite further displeasure, and she couldn’t decide whether bringing the item back to him after mistakenly picking it up counted as “urgent” or not.

“Ah, right. That’s true. I guess there’s no choice, then.”

“Argh, what do I do?! If Sir Zenjirou notices that it’s missing during lunch...”

Zenjirou was far gentler than the norm for lords in their world, and he was unlikely to mete out punishment without allowing her to explain herself, but her imagination would often spiral out of control regardless. She could see a clear image of being given the punishment for theft—the tendons of her dominant hand being severed—and being expelled from the palace.

She let out a fearful scream, then her second roommate spoke consolingly to her. “Hey, Faye, why not just talk to Madam Ines?”

“Huh? Madam Ines?” Faye parroted.

“Right, that could work,” the other replied slowly, prompting Faye to look up and Dolores to look down. As that phrasing would imply, the third girl, Letti, fell directly between the other two in height.

Her size wasn’t particularly noteworthy compared to Faye’s slight stature and Dolores’s height, but her chest was another matter. Her breasts were huge, and her cup size would be one size higher than even Aura’s.

Faye’s words caught in the back of her throat at the suggestion from the busty, sleepy-eyed girl. “Ugh, I...I...”

“Letti’s right, that’s the safest way,” Dolores agreed.

Despite the suggestion, her expression didn't brighten. "But then, if I do that, she'll..."

"Yup, you're gonna get a lecture."

"Good luck."

Dolores gave a slight shrug of her tall shoulders to accompany her unaffected reply, while Letti clenched her fists in front of her as she offered her support.

"Dolores, Letti..." Faye implored, clinging to her two roommates. But they looked away.

It was a little unsympathetic, but this was indeed the best way. Ines was in charge of cleaning, and while certainly a strict superior who was fastidious about their work, she cared deeply for her staff. If Faye confessed and apologized at once, then even if Zenjirou took it as theft, Ines would defend her.

Faye knew, however, she would need to prepare herself for the reprimand of a lifetime. She let out a whine. "Fine. I'm going to see Madam Ines." she sighed, on the verge of tears as she hardened her heart with heroic resolve and shuffled towards the exit.

The others watched her small back silently as she left, before looking at each other. A complete stranger's failure wouldn't matter to them, but their roommate and coworker did.

"Fiiine, I'll come with you. Stand up straight," Dolores said.

"You helped me when I screwed up," added Letti with a giggle.

The two of them quickly jogged after their friend.

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In the end, Ines's response was what they had predicted in every way. After nearly an hour of lecturing, Ines promised to mediate with Zenjirou and released them.

The trio returned to their room and collapsed in both exhaustion and relief.

"Ahh... that was scaaaary!" Faye let out, with a long sigh of relief.

"Well, aren't you glad it went well? Now all you need to do is wait until the

end of lunch and take it back to Sir Zenjirou and apologize. Madam Ines said she'd speak to him, so it should be fine," Dolores said, sitting backwards on a simple wooden chair and rocking it impolitely with a creaking noise.

It was something she could only do thanks to her height and the length of her legs. If Faye sat the same way, her feet wouldn't even reach the floor. Even so, it didn't change the rudeness of her casual behavior.

"Yeah," Faye replied, burying her face in her wheat-stuffed pillow, "it was scary, but I'm glad... now I can sleep in peace!"

"Honestly, she's so..." Dolores stopped, slightly aghast at Faye's prompt decision to settle down for an afternoon nap. "Well," she allowed with a sigh, suddenly reconsidering, "maybe I should take a rest too. I'm a bit tired."

The extra break wasn't for show; it was because even staying completely still at this time of day would result in sweat pouring down one's body. Taking an afternoon nap was the best way to keep up one's stamina.

"What are you doing now, Letti? Going to sleep?" Dolores asked, looking towards the girl in question.

Unfamiliar music suddenly filled the room.

"Letti?! W-What are you doing?!" she demanded, her expression morphing into one of anger.

"Wha? What's that sound?" Faye asked, jerking her head up at the strange noises after having quickly drifted off.

"Hey! What?"

The two girls' eyes came to rest upon Letti, who was holding the open console in her hands with a puzzled look.

"Wait, Letti, what are you doing?!"

"Lettiiii! We just got the lecture over with, don't make it worse!"

Faye and Dolores's screams echoed through the small room.

"Ah, ahahaha..." Letti herself seemed to not realize the depths of her mistake as she laughed relaxedly.

The displays on the top and bottom halves of the console were showing a colorful image and jarring, otherworldly music was issuing from it.

“Looks like it starts working if you just open it... hee hee.”

“W-What do we do?!”

“Ahh, he’s gonna be angry! He’ll definitely be angry this time!”

Dolores and Faye panicked noisily, but Letti hadn’t done much. She’d only opened the folded device. That particular type of console would automatically enter sleep mode even if you closed it while playing. Its owner had probably not bothered to turn it off.

But Faye and Dolores had none of that context and thought that Letti had intentionally set it off. Letti gave her panicking roommates a glance before she noticed a piece of paper within the console and looked questioningly at it.

“Huh? What’s this? Drake parchment?” she asked. It was a sheet of paper, folded into four.

“Letti, come on, you shouldn’t mess with it any—”

“I didn’t know, I didn’t know! Letti’s the criminal now; I’m just an accomplice!” Faye cried.

Letti paid no heed to the shouts behind her as she unfolded the paper and looked it over. She might have played dumb, but she worked in the inner palace, so she could read without a problem.

“This isn’t Her Highness’s writing. Maybe it’s Sir Zenjirou’s? Umm... User instructions... How to play?”

“What’s that?” asked Faye eagerly.

“How to play? Play what?” Dolores questioned, the two of them growing more curious than fearful as they looked over Letti’s shoulder.

“I don’t really know, but I guess it’s talking about this thing? I think it says how to use it.”

“Huh...”

“Maybe Sir Zenjirou wrote it? I suppose he can already read and write our

language.”

In spite of their initial reactions, Faye and Dolores were considered two of the three “problem maids” by their superiors for a reason.

Before they knew it, the three of them were intently reading all about “how to play” with the console.

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One hour later...

“Faye, that one on the right, the red one, get rid of it!” Letti cried.

“No, if you do that, you won’t get a chain. Put that red one vertically and move it to the side,” Dolores argued.

“Ahhh, shut up, shut up! It’s my turn now, so don’t keep butting in!”

The three had become completely engrossed in the game. They were sitting in a line on a simple wooden bed. Faye was in the middle, holding the console, and the others were on either side cheering her on.

The game they were playing was a type of falling block game: relatively simple puzzle games where you controlled blocks, gems, or even slime creatures as they fell downwards from the top of the rectangular screen, and when you lined them up according to the rules, they vanished.

The game inside the console being one of those falling block puzzles was without a doubt a large part of why the girls had become so enamored. If it was an RPG (Role Playing Game) that they couldn’t read, or an SLG (Simulated Life Game), their experience would have stopped with simply enjoying the pretty pictures and strange music.

This was a string of coincidences, though. If Faye hadn’t picked it up by mistake... or if Letti hadn’t given in to her curiosity and opened it... or if the instructions Aura had asked Zenjirou for hadn’t been inside...

Any one of those “ifs” would have spelled the end of their adventure.

“Hurray, I beat the skeleton!”

“Yay, well done, Faye!” Letti celebrated.

“Oh, you beat the skeleton? I’ve already beaten it twice, haha.”

“Why are you being so smug?! Fine, just you watch, I’ll get past you right away!”

As a result of all of those coincidences, the three maids (quite fittingly given their moniker), were completely engrossed in the brand new pleasures of video games.

The next day, as the trio relaxed in their room, they were congregated around the black console again. The difference was that it now had a note with “Free to borrow” stuck on it. In addition, there was a list of how to read Arabic numerals, and the three maids’ names were written on the instructions in English.

Zenjirou also seemed to have played the game the night before and ‘zenjirou’ was listed in the high scores—a clear declaration of war.

“Heh heh heh, interesting. Sir Zenjirou, I shall accept your challenge!” Faye cried, waving her arms around as she smiled fiercely.

“His challenge... that’s a bit of a crude way of putting it, don’t you think? Well, it sounds fun, so I’m in,” Dolores replied, smiling in agreement.

“Ahaha, sounds good, I’ll join too,” Letti added, clapping her hands in front of her huge chest, her unconcerned smile firmly in place.

And thus were the first three Capuan gamers born.

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Several days later...

The infamous trio’s competition had continued each day during their lunch time. They would carry out their duties in the morning and immediately pick up the console for their afternoon break and gather around it in their room. They would feast their eyes on the device for the duration of their free time, and would return it to the living room after lunch. The cycle was well established at this point.

“Yes! I did it, woo! I finally did it!” crowed Dolores, usually the most reserved of the three as she pumped her fists in victory.

“Nooo! You got there first!” Faye cried, kicking her feet and waving her arms.

“Wow, congratulations, you’re amazing,” Letti said, applauding her friend.

Their roommate puffed up her meager chest in pride at recording her score in front of her roommates, holding the console aloft. Given her stature and how high it was raised, Faye and Letti couldn’t see the screen, but Dolores was so excited that she forgot that fact.

“Hah hah, behold, I have finally done it!”

Shining at the top of the high score table was Dolores’s name in the spot where Zenjirou had previously been listed, unbeaten until then. His name was now beneath hers.

Surpassing the console owner’s high score in just a few days was impressively quick, but it felt like it was more than deserving of the word “finally” to Dolores.

“Come on, give it here! It’s my turn now!” Faye pouted, holding onto her roommate’s waist and shaking her as the taller girl held the console out of reach.

“Fine, fine already, let go of me. If you can beat me, go ahead and do it, I’ll take you all on,” she declared with a chuckle.

“Argh, you arrogant giant... I’ll teach you a lesson!” Faye cried, baring her pearly white teeth and half-glaring in challenge at Dolores, who was sitting cross-legged on the bed.

“Argh! I’m. So. Close!”

“Ahh, you nearly had it, Faye,” Letti said encouragingly.

“Well, it’s only natural, that’s the difference in our skill level.”

In spite of Faye’s best efforts, the only one to beat Zenjirou’s score that day was Dolores.

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Faye began the next day burning with enthusiasm.

“Hmph! Just you wait! Really! I’ll totally beat you today!”

She was filled with zeal, her small shoulders as square as she could make them and her short, dark hair almost seeming to bristle as she spun around like an excited hamster.

“Faye, I am glad you’re motivated, but it will come to naught if you allow it to interfere with your work. If you cut corners, you will spend your break re-training,” Ines warned her with a sigh.

“Right, I know!” Even that threat was ineffective on the exuberant maid.

“Truly, this girl...” Ines sighed again exaggeratedly as she paused her dusting.

Of course, she was aware that they had been taking the console and becoming engrossed in it. It had Zenjirou’s writing on it giving them permission to do so, so she had no intention of finding fault with their behavior, but she wouldn’t allow their “playing” to become an impediment to their work.

Their enthusiasm for the game had actually been somewhat beneficial. If they could finish their chores faster, it made their breaks that much longer as well. It was a slight reward considering this world had no precise clocks. A five-or ten-minute extension would usually not be noticeable, but that wasn’t the case for the three gamers. Five or ten minutes was enough for another round of falling blocks.

“I’m done cleaning the sofa! Next is the table!” Faye cheered, much like an elementary schooler whose mother had said, “You can play until dinner once you finish your homework.”

It was probably worth Zenjirou lending them the console if they were *that* into it. Faye washed the dirty cloth thoroughly in her pail of water, then searched for her beloved device before wiping off the table.

Since she had accidentally taken it, Zenjirou would set it on the desk as a clear invitation. In accordance with her hopes, the machine was still sitting there. But there was a slight difference that day... Next to it was an unfamiliar pouch.

“Hmm? What’s this?” she murmured.

It was a small bag that was made out of something other than cloth or leather, a shiny material. The color was mainly white, with colorful spots drawn on it, and was without a doubt one of the prince consort's possessions. Really, anything that was made from unfamiliar materials was doubtless something that Zenjirou had brought over from his world.

The pouch was small enough that even Faye's small hand could fit neatly around it, and it clacked as she picked it up. It felt like there were lots of hard, dried beans packed inside it.

Of course, if that was all, she would have placed it neatly back where it belonged. But there was a yellow slip of paper attached to it.

"A prize for the new high-scorer," declared the tag in neat yet faltering handwriting.

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"So, you brought this back too," Dolores said during their lunch break.

"Yeah, here you go, 'Miss High-Scorer.' I've handed it over."

"Hmm, must have been difficult, good work."

"Wah... You're still being arrogant, you giant..."

Faye had retrieved the mysterious prize and had now given it, in spite of the sour look on her face, to its rightful recipient.

"Hm, I wonder what it is. Come on, come on, open it."

"All right, get off, Letti. Come on, get out of the way and I'll see."

Dolores sat down on the bed and tried to open the strange pouch with careful movements. Inhabitants of this world couldn't tell at a glance how to undo the perfectly sealed container.

"Um, huh? I wonder where it's supposed to open from?"

"What, you can't do it? Give it here."

"You can't get it open? Shall I go get a knife?"

"Ngh... no, it's okay, looks like you can get it from here."

With cautious movements, she tore a vertical opening into it and spread the contents out onto a handkerchief.

Colorful “panned chocolates” covered the fabric in red, blue, yellow, and green.

“Hm, what are these?”

“Food, right? They smell kinda sweet.”

“Hard and sweet food... are they candies?”

The three drew together and looked at the treats curiously. One of the main products of Capua was unrefined sugar, so candies were a relatively common luxury. As far as their knowledge went, the chocolates had a similar look.

Dolores glared at them thoughtfully. They had been given to her as a prize from her lord. Eating them was unlikely to harm her, but she still didn’t want to put something completely new into her mouth.

“Well, they *are* mine, but it would be childish to hoard them, so here,” she said, passing three apiece to her friends.

“Hmhmm, you’re so kind, Dolores,” Faye cheered.

“Whoa, thanks!” Letti exclaimed, both of them unquestioningly accepting her act of “kindness.”

“Well, we should all eat our first one together. All right, on three, okay? One, two... three!”

“Yup!”

“Mm.”

Right, it looks okay, Faye thought as she watched the others from the edge of her vision. Seeing that their faces didn’t twist horribly, she quickly ate her own.

There was a brief silence.

“Mm, it’s sweet.”

“Yeah, I guess they *are* some kind of candy.”

Under the assumption that they were similar to traditional “candies,” the

three girls were rolling the chocolates around in their mouths without chewing. Even so, there were some people who would suck on a candy until it was gone, and others who would simply crunch them apart. Dolores and Letti were in the former category, but Faye was certainly in the latter.

“Mmm....mmm! Mghmm?!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Faye?”

Faye’s already-wide eyes suddenly seemed ready to pop out of her head as she spoke to the others. “It’s... not a candy! They break really easily and there’s something completely different inside! It’s sweet and... it’s *so* delicious!”

Faye had finished eating first and swung her tiny hands around as she put that tastiness into words.

“Oh, it’s not candy? Let’s... see?”

“She’s right! It’s tasty.”

Dolores and Letti quickly followed the other’s example and bit into the chocolates. Coated candies weren’t uncommon, so they were familiar with chewier options, but chocolate didn’t exist in Capua.

“It’s... slightly bitter, but that makes it taste even better somehow.”

The other two looked askance at Dolores’s impressions.

“Really, but it’s sweet?”

“Yeah, it is, is your tongue weird?”

“Ugh, I was a fool to try and discuss anything refined with you guys.”

Their excited opinions didn’t match, but they all shared some enjoyment of the unfamiliar sweets. Faye in particular, having finished her helping in moments, looked up with wide eyes at Dolores and spoke wheedlingly.

“Hey, Doloooooores? I’ve got something to ask youuuu.”

“I’m not giving you any more,” she replied, immediately guessing what Faye was after and scooping the sweets up in the handkerchief before hiding them behind her back.

“Don’t be so meaaaan.”

“No.”

“Puh-leaaase.”

“I said no, so no.”

“Fine! Then I shall have to use force!”

“Don’t make me laugh! Do you really think you can overpower me?!”

Faye had lost her temper now that the pleading had proved ineffective and pounced on Dolores like a cat, but the latter countered her attack with a kick from her long legs.

“Ugh?!” Faye exclaimed, rolling around after taking the blow to her chin. She had rather good reflexes and agility, but there was a fundamental difference in their reaches. As the scuffle unfolded between the mini-skirted maids, their clothing ended up in a state that would never be shown to a gentleman.

That was nothing to them at the moment, though. Faye had recovered on the floor and growled like a cat as she rose up on all fours. Dolores remained seated on the bed, but had her feet off the floor, ready to kick out again at any moment.

Faye hissed at her, and Dolores got ready to block a second attack.

“Come get some!”

Fortunately, the violence didn’t go any further thanks to Letti’s interruption dousing their aggression in cold water.

“Faye, Dolores, if you get too noisy, Madam Ines will hear us.” Her tone was as easy as ever, but there was a sharp dose of reality in her words.

It was their afternoon break, and it wasn’t only they who were resting—Ines would be dozing in her own room. She was fond of her subordinates despite her pickiness, but her tolerance had its limits. This might be their own chamber, but if the noise was audible in the corridor, they’d be stuck with another strict lecture from an angry superior. Faye wanted to avoid that, so she reluctantly withdrew.

“F-fine then. If you’re going to go that far then I’ll let you have them for Letti.”

“You’ll *let* me have them?! They’re mine, mine! Why are you playing at being generous?!” Dolores cried in legitimate anger, but it didn’t penetrate Faye’s greed.

“Mhmmm, it’s fine. If you’re going to be stingy, I’ll just set a new top score and get some for myself.”

Zenjirou had never said that he’d give them sweets every time one of them reached a new high score, but Faye had taken it as such and moved her sights from Dolores to Zenjirou’s chocolate stash.

Faye quickly retrieved the console and sat on her own bed as she turned it on with a seriousness that she seldom showed during work.

“Hahah, just you watch, I’m a new woman now!” she declared.

“You really are; you used to just get rid of them straight away,” Letti observed.

“Wait, Faye? You’re going right for chains?! I thought you said you’d never stoop to such cheap tricks!”

“Who’d say something that stupid? I will do all I can for victory; that is my creed!”

“You did say that! With your own lips! You turn on the spot when things are on the line!”

“Faye, Dolores, you’re being too loud, Madam Ines will——”

Faye’s first turn ended amongst the clamor (or maybe harmony) of cheerful noise.

“Yes! A new personal best! That’s a good sign,” she said, rather satisfied even with that as she smiled widely. But that smile froze on her face when she saw the scoreboard.

“What?”

Dolores had taken the top spot yesterday, even if just barely. And yet, the

name at the top of the screen was now Zenjirou's again.

It was no mistake, and as proof, Dolores's score from yesterday was still below, with another from Zenjirou beneath that. It meant that Zenjirou had played last night and taken the lead again.

And...

"Wow, it's more than double Dolores's score," Letti marveled.

"Wait, so we won't get another prize unless we beat Sir Zenjirou's new high score?"

"It... looks that way."

Silence fell as the three digested the situation, but the quiet didn't last for long.

"No fair, Sir Zenjirou, no fair! That's so childish!" Faye whined.

"Well, it *is* his game. I guess he really held back on his last playthrough," Dolores mused with a soft sigh.

"Ugh, that score's too muuuch..." was Letti's fading moan.

Soon, the room was filled with enough noise to push out the overwhelming heat of the day.

THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE

1



Author:
Tsunehiko Watanabe

Illustrator:
Jyuu Ayakura


He observed the figure in front of him fixedly.
"Welcome, my groom."
THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE 1


"O unseen water scattered throughout the sky, gather at my fingertip and form a sphere."
She raised her index finger into the air and chanted,
THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE 1


Zenjirou and Aura's wedding had concluded without incident, and that night... would be their first together.
"Ah, Aura..."
"Zenjirou."
THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE

THE IDEAL SPONGER LIFE

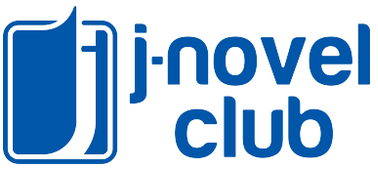
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INTRODUCTION



COULD YOU ABANDON YOUR CURRENT LIFE?!

What would you do if you suddenly found yourself at a fork in the road, facing a decision to **abandon your current life**?
In addition, what if it was to exchange your life for **one in another world**, where you didn't know the country or even era you would be living in?
However, the protagonist of our tale here, **Yamai Zenjirou**, had no real problem with it.
It would cause most people to hesitate.
Compared to his current life of slaving away at 150 hours of overtime, living with a beauty among beauties was far more attractive. She even told him, **"If you provide me an heir, you need not do anything else."**



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RISOU NO HIMOSEIKATSU

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